

# FATHER GOOSE

*The Story of Mack Sennett*

*by*

GENE FOWLER

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TO  
W. C. FIELDS



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# FATHER GOOSE

*The Story of Mack Sennett*

Of youth's glad sports this song foretold me,  
The festival of spring in happy freedom passed.

—GOETHE'S FAUST.



## *Chapter I*

### THE SENSITIVE BOILER MAKER

**M**R. AMOS CABOT resembled his late father in one respect—neither had ever been married. He concurred in the opinion of certain poets that there is no honesty in love; there is no wisdom in love; there is no foresight in love. Other than the affair of the bronze medal, it would seem that Mr. Cabot never had been caught in the ambushes of passion.

Mr. Cabot served as pacemaker at the iron works of East Berlin, Connecticut. He was petty boss in the boiler department, and threw white-hot rivets ten hours a day. His pointed skull had the bleak quality of a carbuncle. His stumpy legs were bowed like the gams of a Yorkshire groom and he danced strangely as he worked, after the manner of a badly hanged thief.

He was accounted a pinchpenny screw, his soul a black plague of avarice. He operated on a piece-work basis; the more rivets, the fatter his pay envelope. His hard-pressed crew labored on the flat-rate schedule of a dollar and a half a day each, irrespective of the number of bolts banged through the boiler plates. It was the opinion and belief of his underlings that Mr. Cabot was so morbidly intent on amassing wealth that he had schooled himself assiduously to abstain from visiting the foundry latrine—so as not to miss out on an extra rivet or two. Nor did it please him when his aides knocked off work because of washroom interludes. He put handfuls of raw oatmeal in the drinking buckets each morning.

“Oatmeal gives you more self-control,” he would say.

He was a solemn little fuss-budget, this Amos Cabot, as humorless as a moulting duck. He never smiled or cut capers, which in itself seemed odd, inasmuch as his father was said to have been a circus clown.

Although he was unpopular with the men, dogs seemed to like Mr. Cabot. They followed at his heels as he came to work, waited outside the gate until the shift was done, then traipsed after him again as he went home. He walked with a singular bogtrotter's motion, a gait supposedly inherited from his mother. She first had met Amos's father at a dance in Bridgeport, the circus winter quarters. Her subsequent nervous breakdown may have affected the unborn

child. How he came by a habit of touching every tree on the route to and from the iron works was not explained, but that practice exactly suited the meandering didoes of his mongrel retinue.

Scandal-mongers often referred to Mr. Cabot's alleged peccadilloes. Such uncouth comment affected the good man's adrenals until blood gorged his neck. He particularly abhorred gossip regarding the disappearance of a bronze medal awarded him by the company in commemoration of a quarter century of proficiency in the boiler shop.

His detractors claimed that a notorious village Rahab, Miss Zelda Mahoney, had stolen the medal from Mr. Cabot's snap-purse one June night, thinking it a twenty-dollar gold piece. Unfortunately, he was unable to produce the commemorative disk in refutation of the charge. And the company, in accordance with business ethics, would not give him another token of esteem until twenty-five more years would have elapsed.

"As God is my judge," Mr. Cabot would cry out, "the woman don't live that'd get a medal out of me."

Certain female troglodytes of the town, a sprinkling of hash-house Gretchens, had set their caps for Mr. Cabot, but he appeared not to have noticed their ambitious designs. Either their art was so inferior or his resistance so prodigious that nothing whatsoever came of these hope-chest wiggle-giggings and pussycat gambols.

"I know these angels," he would say; "they got wings of ice."

Until the panic of 1893, Mr. Cabot had owned a bachelor's cottage within a rivet's throw of the boiler shop. His greatest fear was that he might die a pauper and be buried in potter's field. Against this melancholy possibility, he had bought a plot in the East Berlin cemetery. He kept a home-made coffin hidden in a closet of his cottage, and in the coffin a black broadcloth burial suit with liberal ballast of camphor balls.

The panic took the Cabot cottage and its furnishings—all except the coffin and the broadcloth cerements. He carted these sepulchral props to a warehouse for future reference and set about to mend his fortunes. For a time thereafter, Mr. Cabot pondered the tax-exempt and rent-free advantages of pitching a pup-tent and living on the site of his grave. The city fathers caused him to abandon that plan, so he went to reside with Joe Bingham, an iron-works colleague. Mr. Bingham was a "booster," or "bucker-up," at the boiler factory. He held the hot rivets while a helper hammered them through the plates.

These men did not get on together as fellow-lodgers, although both were New Englanders. They behaved like mismatched woodpeckers. Between them there was so much petty bickering that if one of them had been female, they easily could have passed as a married couple. There was but one bed, and Mr. Cabot's nightly insistence on letting his dogs sleep in it was a source of endless debate.

The buckler-up sometimes awakened as though in a nightmare to shout: "Get them curs outta this bed, Amos. It dri'es me crazy!"

Mr. Cabot would defend his mongrels. "These dogs ain't botherin' nobody. Just roll over and shut up."

Relations became so brittle that the men stopped speaking to each other. In the evenings Mr. Bingham would sit, smoking his pipe, and Mr. Cabot would chew snuff. Each suspected the other of being insane.

In the mornings, if Mr. Bingham chanced to be first up to use the washbasin, Mr. Cabot would make a point of scouring it, a hygienic innuendo of a leprous condition. If they had cake or pie for supper, the buckler-up had to keep an eye on the petty boss. Mr. Cabot had a sweet tooth and might gobble up the whole pastry.

This condition of cross purposes obtained until October of the year 1897. It was just as well that something definite occurred; the estranged companions apparently were headed for an axe-murder.

These men subscribed jointly to a newspaper, the *Hartford Courant*, which was mailed them. Formerly they had divided it immediately on its receipt, one reading half of it while his colleague read the other half, then exchanging the halves. Now they began racing to the mail box and the winner kept the *whole* paper to himself until he had finished with it. The loser would sit and brood, waiting painfully to learn what had happened in the world the day before yesterday.

Mr. Cabot suddenly became so successful in capturing the *Courant* first, day after day, that Mr. Bingham wondered at it. He discounted an early surmise that the petty boss had bribed the postman; Mr. Cabot was too conservative to lay out money in that fashion. The buckler-up discarded theory and began to watch his companion's every move. To his amazement he learned that the petty boss had put up a *second* mail box on a tree some distance from the front gate and had instructed the letter carrier to leave the *Courant* there instead of at the regular box.

On discovery of this double dealing, the buckler-up decided to say nothing but to catch the petty boss red-handed. Perhaps he might shame him.

One October afternoon Mr. Cabot visited his secret mail box, and was busy reading that Lieutenant Robert E. Peary had welcomed some Esquimaux aboard the Arctic steamer *Hope*, and that His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, was sinking into a coma.

Mr. Bingham descended on the petty boss. "So *that's* it, you sneak!" said the buckler-up. "I might of knowed you was a low sneak."

Mr. Cabot was so startled he threw the paper at his critic. "Take it, you cheap spy!" he said. "I'm sick and tired of this here naggin'. There's a limit."

"Oho!" said Mr. Bingham. "Gettin' kinda touchy, eh?"

"Just shut up. I'm packin' outta here."

"Oho!" said Mr. Bingham. "Kinda sensitive, eh? Leavin',

eh? Well, go ahead and leave! And take your goddam kidneys and your cur dogs with you, too, you sneakin' tightwad! It's good news to me."

Mr. Cabot said nothing in reply. He walked toward the house. Several of his dogs, including a moth-eaten half-setter, named Margaret, romped at his heels.

The buckler-up ran after Mr. Cabot and took hold of his arm. "Admit you been a sneak. Go ahead and admit it."

He began to pull and haul at Mr. Cabot. The dogs, not understanding the logic of human behavior, misinterpreted the buckler-up's gestures as a threat of violence. Margaret studied the tableau hastily, then sank her teeth in the buckler-up's left hip. The other Cabot adherents contributed voice and tusk and made Maypole ribbons of his trousers.

The buckler-up began screaming. "Get them curs off'n me, for Crice sake! Help! It's *me*, Margaret, you damn fool!"

Neighbors came to the rescue with brooms, stones, hot-water kettles and advice. Mr. Cabot went inside the house. He placed his belongings in a carpetbag. The buckler-up and neighbors were in a huddle, discussing the wounds and whether to summon the surgeon or the constable, when Mr. Cabot re-appeared with his carpetbag. He strode from the neighborhood with a great and cynical dignity, nor did he pause to touch trees or perform his customary minuet until out of sight and sound of his late home.





## *Chapter 2*

### HOSPITALITY AMONG THE TOMBS

THE sensitive Mr. Cabot next was seen walking the streets as Sunday dawn touched the elms of East Berlin. He was doing a gloomy polka, the mongrel troop traveling in his wake. A Mr. McClusky, on his way to Mass, said he had heard the petty boss speaking crossly to Margaret. She had found a dead lark and was trying to present it to her master. It was apparent that Mr. Cabot's command was being ignored.

"Put it down, Margaret," he said. "Put that God-forsaken bird down."

A later report on the wanderer had him mooning near the cemetery, wherein lay his only real estate. Mr. Riddle, the asthmatic milkman on Route No. 2, said he had heard Mr.

Cabot pleading with one of his dogs as it sniffed a graveyard hedge.

"Please come outta there, Duke," he said. "Where you think you are?"

Mr. Cabot pranced through the gate, past the chapel and down a gravel lane leading to his property. His spirits rose as he thought of his holdings. He half nodded to each memorial stone, reading the names aloud like an alderman speaking to worth-while neighbors at a clam bake.

On approaching his plot, he saw a lunch bucket and a coat at the plinth of a column reared above the bones of the late Arthur Medbury. This granite shaft bore the legend: "A Loving Husband and Devoted Father." Mr. Cabot was so footsore and famished as to fear himself daft and the lunch bucket a mirage.

As he advanced toward his own parcel of real estate, he heard a sloshing sound and was amazed to find a gravedigger working at this early hour. This stout fellow was sinking a pit at the very boundary of the Cabot holdings. The trench-maker was up to his chin in the trough, as busy as a beetle, grunting and throwing wet gravel and soupy clay onto Mr. Cabot's plot.

Mr. Cabot pushed Margaret and her bird aside and peered into the fosse. "Hey! What's the idea, desecratin' my land?"

The digger, a Falstaffian Portuguese in fisherman's hip-boots, looked up and grinned: "Hello, pardner." Then he began to delve and splash again with a long-handled spade,

like a bayman tonging for oysters. He was as happy as a gondolier and hummed a folk song as he wallowed.

Mr. Cabot cuffed Margaret's ears. "Take that bird and drop it somewhere, Margaret. I won't tell you again." Then he leaned once more over the pit. "Who give permission to sling mud onto my property? Do you know whatcha doin'?"

The Portuguese's head bobbed up like a marker-buoy. "I'm diggin' a hole to put ole Tom Benson in. What time is it?"

Margaret almost pushed Mr. Cabot into the cavity. "Take that bird somewheres, Margaret," he yelled, "or you can't sleep with me no more." He began lecturing into the grave. "Now look here, Porchie, you oughtta know better'n trespass like this!" He pointed pridefully across the chasm. "That's *my* property."

The Portuguese stood up straight and craned his neck in a professional way. "Zat so? You should of bought a more dryer site, pardner. Just lookut me. Up to my crotch in water."

Mr. Cabot struggled to maintain a proper cemeterial manner. "You might of put down a tarpaulin, what with all that muck. I oughtta sue somebody."

The Portuguese screwed up his eye. "Did yah hear about ole man Benson?"

Mr. Cabot began to dance impatiently. "The hell with him."

"That's what his widow said at the funeral parlors. The

ole boy left plenty insurance, but not to *her*. A fortune of eight hundred dollars! Whee!"

"The hell with her, too."

The Portuguese leaned on his spade. "The undertaker—you know Joe Fishback—he tole me ole Benson left all his insurance to a fat chippy named Zelda."

The mention of that medal-loving lady made Mr. Cabot swallow hard. "You keep away from me, Margaret," he said wheezily. "You're a bad girl, that's whatcha are."

"And Mrs. Benson never knowed he was a chaser till the minute ole Tom lay dyin' with cholera morbus. He confessed. Can you imagine?"

"Now look here, Porchie," said Mr. Cabot, "you have to tidy up my property or I'll sue."

The Portuguese waved a muddy arm, an Edgar Lee Masters on the job. "If some of these graves could only talk, lotsa flossy epitaphs'd have to be changed in a hurry. Eh, pardner? God A'mighty and Moses! Mrs. Benson was so confused about this Zelda scandal, she roused me outta bed to sink this hole. 'Box him in and bury the filthy criminal quick,' she says. He only passed out two hour ago, screamin' for Zelda. That's speed for yah. Zelda's in a state of collapse, they say."

Mr. Cabot was dancing full tilt now. Must a man always be reminded of his Adamic lapses? The Portuguese surveyed these ballet steps diagnostically. "Pardner, you're welcome to slip behindst Mr. Medbury's stone. That's where I allus

go—unlest, of course, some member of the fambly is present.”

The Portuguese puckered his mouth and winked like a satyr. “Mr. Medbury was another cucumber that give his wife hell on earth. His quiet hobby was women.” He began pointing from the crater, his arm moving with the semaphoric jerks of a referee over knocked-down fighters. “Women? *This* is the answer. They was the downfall of Mr. Gissing and Mr. Draper and all three Moulton brothers over in that there plot with the marble angel. Secret roosters. God A’mighty and Moses, pardner, if these harmless graves could only talk! Go right behindst Mr. Medbury’s stone. Nobody’ll peek.”

Mr. Cabot began pacing back and forth like a district attorney. Then he circled the pit with an Indian dance. “Whose business is it *where* I buy a grave? What’s it to *you* if I buy a wet grave or a dry one? Who’re *you* to tell me what I should ought to do?”

The Portuguese was alarmed, fearing he had committed a *faux pas*. “God, pardner! You ain’t a member of the *Medbury* fambly by any chanct?”

Mr. Cabot disregarded the wet mound of clay on his property. He sat down weakly on the slimy parapet and groaned. Margaret seized on this opportunity to deposit the dead bird in his lap. He accepted it absently and stared at the Portuguese’s lunch pail.

The gravedigger peered sheepishly over the rim of his pit.

"I wanna apologize to you, Mr. Medbury. I hope to drop dead right where I'm standin' if I ever used your brother's grave excep' in a big emergency."

Mr. Cabot became aware of the bird. He hurled it from him, almost hitting the Portuguese. He wiped his hand on a pants-leg. "Don't talk to me," he said. "Just shut up."

The Portuguese was worried. "If I spoke out of turn, Mr. Medbury, then let's just shake hands and forget it."

"I ain't Mr. *Medbury*, Porchie, so just shut up."

The Portuguese made another deduction, "If I ain't too inquisitive, pardner, mebbe you're a relative of this here Mr. *Benson*, or of his widow?"

"I'm tired and hungry," said Mr. Cabot. "So just shut up and be damn' sure you clean up this here mess, or I'll sue."

The Portuguese was interested. "Tired and hungry, eh, pardner? Well, just open that there lunch pail and help yourself. Live and let live is my motto."

This mark of hospitality touched Mr. Cabot. Seldom had anyone offered him anything but gibes. "That's kinda white of you," he said. "I'm not no tramp. I just happened to be lookin' for a place to room and board and stopped in here to think."

"This place *is* a sort of roomin' house at that," said the Portuguese. "You *ain't* a Mr. Medbury or a Mr. Benson then?"

Mr. Cabot had opened the lunch pail and was chewing on

a sandwich. "I ain't nobody's relative at all, thank God."

The Portuguese nodded. "Lotsa people'd give their eye-teeth to be able to say that. Relatives is the worst thing a man can have. But I shouldn't ought to kick. The more relatives there is, the more they devil their people to death, and the more graves I get to dig. Take that plot over there, for instance—the one with the sandstone balls on the ends and the motto: 'JESUS IS A ROCK.' Five of ole lady Hosmer's husbands is planted there . . . God, but you *are* hungry! Go right ahead, pardner."

Mr. Cabot caught Margaret just in time. "No! No! No!" he said. "I don't *want* it, Margaret." He thought for a while, admiring the pie. "Where is it you board?"

The gravedigger had been bailing out the trench with a battered bucket. "Well, pardner, their name is Sinnott. John F. Sinnott and his wife and four children. An Irish family. Irregardless of the hell I've had with Irishmen in my time, I gotta admit this place is great—with one or two exceptions."

"How cheap is it?"

"It's four dollars a week for a single gent and they pack your lunch bucket. It ain't everybody that gets punkin' pie in his nosebag, eh, pardner?"

Mr. Cabot was feeling happier now. He rose, did a few pirouettes to settle his meal and kept his eyes away from his violated property. "Thanks for the snack. You said this boardin' house had one or two exceptions. For instance?"

The Portuguese kept bailing out the grave as he talked. "They may have to bury ole man Benson in a punt," he said. "Well, it's a long story about these here Sinnotts. They come down from Canada a few months ago. Quebec. A town called Danville, I think the ole man said. He's a whale of a feller, six foot three and good-natured. The mother of the family—he calls her Catherine—is kinda partial to one of her sons, Michael. So there is some fights *oncet* in a while betwixt the boys. Michael's seventeen and can fight like hell. The other boys, George—he's the oldest—and John Junior, can fight like hell, too. Well, the ole man *let's 'em* fight. He sets on the cellar steps while they fight and umpires it. Oncet he got mixed up in the fight and one of the boys give him a lacin'. The ole man didn't resent bein' belted around, but he says to me: 'Leon,' he says, 'Leon, the saddest moment in a man's whole life is when his son gets big enough to lambaste him.' "

Mr. Cabot wagged his finger at Duke. "You get away from Mr. Medbury's property, Duke." Then to the Portuguese: "You mean the Sinnott house is noisy? That what you mean?"

Leon looked down at his work. "You'd think this grave was the middle of Lake Erie. Is the house *noisy*? You ain't heard the half of it. I can see you're a quiet man, not used to noise."

"No? I'm boss at a boiler factory," said Mr. Cabot, not without pride. "The pacemaker."

The Portuguese's jaw dropped with amazement. "The hell



you say! The iron works, hey? Well, they tell me lotsa the boys there know fat Zelda, ole Benson's chippy." He winked so lecherously that his eye seemed a lemon in a squeezer. "Maybe *you* know Zelda, eh, pardner?"

Mr. Cabot almost strangled. "Women don't mean a damn to me. They're bad medicine."

The Portuguese nodded and cleaned his ear of mud. "Where was I? Oh, yeah. The noise. Well, like I said, this middle son, Mike, a bull if there ever was one, thinks he'll be an opry singer. His ole man's dead set agin it. 'Leon,' says ole man Sinnott to me, 'Leon, I never thunk I'd live to see the day a son of mine'd take singin' more seriouser than decent work. I'd sooner see him in one of your graves than be a sissy lollygagger in tights at some perfumed theayter.' But the mother sympathizes with the boy, who sings like some big bull. He sings bass till he looks strangled. God A'mighty and Moses! You should ought to hear it. A little dago named Signor Fontana comes oncet a week to give him lessons. Hah! Fifty cents a lesson, or I hope to drop dead. Opry! Hah! What do you think of opry, pardner?"

Mr. Cabot pulled at his lip. "My experience with opera is it stinks."

"That's practically what I tole young Mike. I says to him: 'Mike,' I says, 'Mike, you're a good kid but you're ridin' for a fall, not to mention breakin' your pore ole father's heart. You should ought to give up this Signor Fontana, because he's nothin' but a downright musical pimp.' And all Mike did

was just stand there and laugh. His brothers don't like it a bit, this singin' business. They play cards and sneer—and all in all it makes for lotsa noise. Singin' an' fightin', singin' an' fightin', and that prissy little dago puttin' on airs—but outside of that the food's the best there is and plenty of it."

"Where's this here place at?" said Mr. Cabot.

"You go four blocks east on Maple, turn left and it's half a block. A big yeller house with geraniums. Just say I sent yah."

Having failed repeatedly to foist the defunct bird on her master, Margaret carried it over to the Portuguese and laid it on the edge of the grave. She lolled out her tongue, wagged her tail and wheezed. Leon picked up the bird, inspected it, then said to Mr. Cabot:

"I guess you don't want her to have it?"

"I been talkin' to her all mornin' against it," said Mr. Cabot. "But when a bitch gets somethin' into her head, what's the use?"

"Well," said Leon, "I'll just put it in ole man Benson's grave. Won't he be surprised on Judgment Day? A little bird singin' in his ear?"

## *Chapter 3*

### BASSO PROFUNDO

**I**T was the twentieth wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. John F. Sinnott. Their whole establishment was celebrating when Mr. Cabot arrived to become a member of the household. There was good beer and a profusion of roast turkey, spiced cookies and great puddings. The boarders and many neighbors participated in this fête. They crowded about Mamma Sinnott, telling her over and over again how young she looked and what a lucky fellow Papa Sinnott was.

The effusive host moved among his guests, beaming and calling out: "Have some more beer and turkey. There's plenty for all." Mr. Cabot was half-hidden in an alcove—and near a cake stand. Papa Sinnott dragged him out to meet everybody.

"Bring this honored guest some beer. Where's Mr. Cabot's beer?"

"I never indulge," Mr. Cabot explained. "It bloats me."

The Sinnotts received all that afternoon, and at night gave a banquet with more beer and a whole roast pig, an apple in its mouth. Against his better judgment, Papa Sinnott had included the music master, Signor Fontana, among the guests. Mamma Sinnott had urged him not to snub Michael's vocal instructor.

"Be nice to Signor Fontana," she said; "he's not long for this world."

"I'll do it for you, Catherine," said Papa Sinnott, almost jerking his black mustache loose from its moorings. "Only don't expect me to kiss him."

Signor Fontana, a furtive little man who smelled of moth balls, appeared in a high stiff collar, ascot tie and frock coat. He stayed out of Papa Sinnott's way as much as possible, remaining at a corner table examining his pupil's collection of old coins. He also avoided the brothers, George and Junior, who were eating turkey and playing euchre at another table. Occasionally they looked across the room and leered.

Mr. Cabot, hearing the clink of coins, sidled over to Signor Fontana and Michael, horn-piping his way among the happy guests. The sight or sound of anything produced by the mint naturally interested the petty boss.

Michael was glad to tell the history of his coins. "Most

of 'em was left to my mother by an ancestor, Robert Masterson."

Mr. Cabot brought out his bandana kerchief. A blast stopped conversation all over the room. The card-playing brothers sniggered as Mr. Cabot's neck grew red.

"Garlic's good for a cold," said Signor Fontana, bowing from the hips.

Michael did not chuckle or otherwise pretend to have noticed the Gabriel's trumpet quality of the Cabot snout. He seemed a rather serious young man, not given to add to anyone's embarrassment. He quickly resumed his talk regarding coins, as though nothing had happened. The petty boss gave him a grateful glance.

"This Mr. Masterson," said Michael, "had a farm at Richmond. He worked on the fortifications of Quebec and got a medal from the Government."

Mr. Cabot frowned at the mention of medals. "It's real old money, eh?"

Young Sinnott picked up a shilling. "This is a King James's coin. Worth more'n five dollars."

Mr. Cabot was sceptical. "It ain't gold."

Signor Fontana inspected the coin. "Five dollar! *Si, si*. Enough for ten music lessons." He bowed from the hips to Mr. Cabot. "You should hear my pupil sing. Like one great bird."

Leon, the Portuguese gravedigger, arrived now. He seemed a favorite with the guests, who greeted him with

oblique references to his profession. He waved when he saw Mr. Cabot and beckoned.

"Come to the bathroom while I wash the mud off'n me," he said. "God A'mighty and Moses, pardner! You should of hung around till the internment."

"Did you clean up the mess on my property?"

The gravedigger raised his right hand. "Not a blade of grass was harmed. Comin' to the bathroom with me, pardner?"

"No," said Mr. Cabot. "No."

Mamma Sinnott was shaking a finger at the Portuguese. "Leon," she said, "how many times I told you not to bring mud into the house? Now go get cleaned up. We got roast pig."

Leon beamed as Mamma Sinnott went to the kitchen. "Pardner, there goes the most sweetest woman in the world. Well, you sure missed a riot. Fat Zelda showed up, blubberin' as big as life." Mr. Cabot stiffened and turned pale. The Portuguese went on: "Nobody expected the widow to appear, what with her collapse on account of the insurance. I was helpin' the pallbearers ease ole Tom's box into the grave—by the way, I put the bird where I said—and who comes rushin' from behindst Mr. Medbury's stone? Who d'yah think, pardner?"

"I ain't concerned," said Mr. Cabot. "Just so's you cleaned up the mess."

"Well, sir, it was the widow. We was all so busy with

the tapes, lettin' Tom down easy, that our hands was tied. We couldn't stop the fracas. The widow first off rammed Zelda in the eye with an umbrella and then picked up my spade. God A'mighty and Moses! It was wonderful! The Reverend Mowbry slipped on the wet clay and fell over the only floral piece, Zelda's, a bleedin' heart done in carnations. They had to lend Zelda an overcoat to go home in, she was that stark nakut, and both her eyes was swole shut."

Mr. Cabot began to perspire and blotted his forehead with the bandana. His eyes popped out like rivets.

The Portuguese went to the bathroom, whistling gaily.

After the banquet there were speeches, and Michael prepared to sing "In the Gloaming." His brothers had resumed card playing as a demonstration of their lack of interest in Michael's virtuosity. Someone had put a newspaper inside the strings of the upright piano, and when Signor Fontana began to fondle the keys, the instrument gave out a stale, drumming rat-tat-tat. Whether the brothers had had anything to do with this atrocity, no one could say. They bent above their cards, paying no attention. Signor Fontana remedied the evil, bowed from the hips and started afresh.

By the time Michael had concluded his song *Mamma Sinnott* was in tears. Even Papa had softened a mite regarding musical education. There was an encore and Michael obliged with an aria in Italian.

This was a most unhappy choice. Hardly had Michael bel-

lowed the first phrases than Papa Sinnott banged a large fist on the arm of his chair and rose among the startled guests.

"Stop!" he thundered. "Not another word of the dago language in *this* house! The party's over."

Everyone was uneasy. Michael stood, glowering. Signor Fontana bobbed up and down on the piano stool, shrugging until his ascot tie climbed to the top of his stiff collar and threatened to garrote him. Michael left the room; his mother followed him. The card-playing brothers went to the kitchen for some roast pig. The gravedigger nudged Mr. Cabot's side and said:

"It's been an excitin' day, eh, pardner?"

The boarders retired, shaking their heads. Outside the house, departing neighbors were stumbling over Mr. Cabot's slumbering dogs, causing many yowls. Papa Sinnott lit his pipe and slumped moodily in his chair. Mr. Cabot sat across the room, chewed snuff and meditated.

Finally Papa Sinnott got up, went to a window and knocked the ashes from his pipe. "Well," he said, "let's me and you split a bottla beer."

"I never indulge," said Mr. Cabot.

"That's right. I forgot. Well, all I got to say is Signor Fontana's a bad influence. Whatcha think?"

Mr. Cabot pondered a while, then handed down a decision. "My experience with singin' teachers is they're all wind and no brains."

Papa Sinnott rose grandly and crossed the room. "Mr. Ca-



bot, I wanna shake hands with you. You're welcome to my house, not as a boarder, but as a friend."

By the end of the year Mr. Cabot was the favored boarder. Whenever there were disputes concerning politics or domestic problems, Papa Sinnott submitted such matters to the owl-faced petty boss. "He's a solid citizen," Papa would say, tapping his head. "Plenty of gray matter."

Mr. Cabot found a place in the boiler works for Michael. He personally taught the young man the tricks of the trade, and soon Michael was using the hammer effectively on rivets. These were the days before pneumatic hammers, and the rivets were massaged with a hand sledge.

Michael was a good workman; Mr. Cabot admitted as much. He could hold his own in all respects. He earned a dollar and a half a day, and Papa Sinnott was happy until the young man announced one evening that he planned to extend his musical horizon. He had decided to take a lesson from Signor Fontana *every night!*

Papa Sinnott was astounded. He refused a third helping of cabbage and rose from the table. "This *is* the end," he said. "I wash my hands of his future."

Mamma Sinnott spent two hours soothing her husband. "After all," she said, "the boy's a good, honest lad, hard working. He turns in most of his money to the family—except what he uses for music or to buy old coins. What if he

*does* want to sing? What if he *does* want to spend fifty cents a night on his music?"

Papa Sinnott seemed to have aged considerably. "Let him go ahead and do it. But mark my word, he's rushin' to his ruin."

A man's first job is a most important matter; it is life's real morning. Great industrialists recall their early employment as office boys, grocery clerks, printer's devils or livery stable valets. The ship owner remembers his first rowboat more vividly perhaps than he does last season's record-breaking liner and tells how he peddled fish. The statesman will interrupt an arms conference to boast that he was the best horse trader in Missouri. With the curious exception of motion-picture magnates, successful men like to dwell on these first jobs which seem so small and obscure until woven into the fabric of a dominant career.

And a man's first boss is frequently more important in a realistic world than are his parents. A father or mother tries to teach a boy how to live. A boss shows him how to cope with life. The academic words of schoolmasters long are dead in a man's memory, but the bread-and-butter philosophies of a first boss never grow old or untrue.

Weazened, neurotic Amos Cabot, proudly disdaining all kidney eccentricities and disorders, dancing grimly and without humor, working with daffy persistence and conscience-stricken with the thought of his only amatory lapse, had a

lasting influence over Michael Sinnott. The years in the boiler factory not only toughened the muscles of the young man but gave him something of Mr. Cabot's brooding qualities, a hidden sensitivity, a love for animals, a persistence and gameness that bordered on fanaticism.

The young man was of the earth, and although he had his share of dreams, his feet really never left the ground. Whatever he became, however fantastic his deeds or bizarre his behavior, there was something ruggedly earthy in his nature.

He had had little schooling, and it is conceivable that the tutelage of Mr. Cabot contributed largely to Michael's lifelong habit of using his eyes and ears instead of his mouth.

"Keep shut up as much as possible," Mr. Cabot told him.

Michael grew to one hundred and eighty pounds and was still adding to the girth of his chest by the time he was twenty-five. He worked with iron, and that metal became a part of him. He was not quarrelsome, but advanced straightway into a fight when it was forced upon him. He was well liked, but sometimes his fellow-workers regarded him as moody and given to strange periods of woolgathering.

Work did not interfere with Michael's musical ambitions. He took lessons daily from Signor Fontana. Papa Sinnott tried to be resigned to fate. The father and son quit referring to music, and whenever the Signor called for the evening lesson, Papa Sinnott would go for walks—weather permitting—with Mr. Cabot.

One moonlit night they strolled as far as the cemetery, where Mr. Cabot showed Papa Sinnott a new tombstone reared over his future abode.

"Nobody's gonna catch *me* unprepared," said Mr. Cabot, jiggling proudly beside his granite marker.

Papa Sinnott knocked the ashes from his pipe, using Mr. Medbury's stone. "Amos," he said, "you been with us a long time, and I think you got a lotta influence on Mike."

Mr. Cabot was on his knees in the moonlight, looking for plantain weed in the sod. "What's your problem?"

"The boy says he's goin' to New York and join up with the theayter. Mebbe you could put a spoke in it. I guess he . . ."

Papa Sinnott almost jumped out of his skin. Something went past him. He was a brave man, but the suddenness of having his leg brushed in a cemetery unnerved him. The intruder was Mr. Cabot's old friend, Margaret. She muzzled up to her hero, who said: "Margaret, you shouldn't ought to be up this late."

Margaret was very old now and—like the vital Mrs. Hosmer—had outlived many husbands. She moved rather stiffly, and, when Mr. Cabot patted her flank, moaned as though rheumatism had caught up with her.

"Let's get out of here," said Papa Sinnott.

On the way home, Mr. Cabot said: "Michael's a man now, and mebbe you should give him his head. Come to think of it, there's not much future in a boiler factory. Sometimes

I wish'd I had of followed my impulse and gone into the navy."

He looked back at the cemetery, his customary gavotte seeming less spirited than in other years. "A boy has a right to think for hisself."

Papa Sinnott was very sad. "I never thunk you'd turn against me, Amos; this kinda hurts me inside."

The day arrived when Mr. Cabot bogged down and had to stay home from work. A highly embarrassing condition had arisen. He who had been noted for so many years as a champion of self-control now found himself utterly lacking in certain respects. He left his rivets for as many times as twice each hour. The thoughtless iron workers noticed these recesses and commented rudely.

On the day when the petty boss remained at home, Michael took his place at the rivet forge. He worked the men so hard they grumbled: "He'll be another slave driver like Amos."

After the noon whistle had blown, Mr. Bingham, the buckler-up, and two blacksmith's helpers interviewed Michael. "What's this I hear about old Amos?" the buckler-up asked. "Out chasin' the gals?" The blacksmith's helpers laughed at this witticism.

Michael had opened his lunch bucket and was sitting beside it. "He'll be back on the job tomorrow."

"Oh," said a helper. "Maybe he's over at Zelda's, lookin' for his medal."

"Maybe," said Michael.

"You and him's kinda thick, eh?" asked the buckler-up. "Ever go with him to Zelda's place?"

One helper now deliberately turned over Michael's bucket with his foot. "I beg your pardon," said the helper, while the others sniggered. "I was lookin' for Amos's medal."

Young Sinnott got up and let drive at the lunch-pail-tipper's chin. The man went down. The other helper charged Michael. They battled for several seconds before the first helper recovered enough of his health to re-enter the fray. Two men of his department sought to help Michael, but he waved them aside. "I'll take care of this," he said. He proceeded to give the blacksmith's helpers a lacing.

With his foes on their haunches, Sinnott turned to the buckler-up. "Don't ever bring up the subject of medals again. Mr. Cabot's an old man now. You're an old man, too, Bingham, or I'd bust you in the snoot."

Mr. Cabot didn't return to the boiler factory. His right leg pained him. There was a bruised appearance to his foot. He wouldn't lie down, but sat in a chair reading the Book of Job. The company doctor called on him. "Amos," said the physician, "I don't think you should go back to work."

"For how long?" said Mr. Cabot.

"Amos, you got something very serious. The test shows you have diabetes."

"Meanin' what?"

"Your kidneys are out of whack."

Mr. Cabot endeavored to rise from the chair, the better to dance his displeasure. He sank back, however, gritting his teeth. "It's what they call irony," he said.

The physician was packing his clinical case. "Rest all you can, stay in bed and quit eating anything with sugar in it. I'll see you next week. No pie or cake, Amos."

Mr. Cabot refused to stay in bed. He sat on the front steps with old Margaret, watching the men on their way to and from work. Many of his former colleagues, men who had not liked him particularly, made a point of passing the Sinnott home to wave at Mr. Cabot as he sat brooding. They did not poke fun at him now.

Margaret took to howling like a pessimistic wolf. This made the neighbors nervous.

Late in 1905, and with the first snow, Amos Cabot went to the hospital. Surgeons said they would have to amputate his right leg above the knee. A life-long passion for pastry and sweets had downed him. He had diabetic gangrene. He said he was not afraid.

Michael accompanied him to the hospital. He asked the old man if there were anything he might do.

"There is," said Mr. Cabot. "I'm goin' to pass out and I

want nobody but Leon to dig my grave. My burial suit and a casket is in a warehouse at Danbury. You might as well go now and get 'em. Bring 'em to East Berlin just in case."

Michael took time off from the boiler department and went to Danbury. He not only arranged for transportation of the Cabot burial equipment, but also chanced on something of the highest importance. While looking at a collection of coins in a pawnshop window, he saw a medal. It showed a man in relief wielding a hammer, and had a motto—"Honesty, Industry, Loyalty"—embossed above the man with the hammer.

Michael went into the pawn shop and examined the medal. On the reverse side it bore an American eagle with the inscription: "Presented to Amos Cabot, March 8, 1894, for twenty-five years of meritorious service." Michael bought the medal for a dollar and twenty cents.

On returning to East Berlin, Michael took the medal to the hospital. The authorities would not permit him to visit Mr. Cabot.

"He had a bad night," the nurse said. "They operated on him yesterday afternoon."

Michael waited for the company physician, who said: "You can go in for a minute, Mike. I guess Amos is tough enough to stand it."

The former petty boss was quite conscious; presumably something had been done to ease his pain. "Did you get my things?" he asked.



"I did," said Michael. "And I got somethin' else, too."

He showed the medal. Mr. Cabot stared at it wordlessly for a full minute. There were tears in his eyes. "God bless you, Michael," he said. "God bless you."

Michael told where he had found the medal. Finally Mr. Cabot said slyly: "Did the fellow know who hocked it?"

"The record showed it was brought in by a Miss Zelda Mahoney in 1901."

Mr. Cabot's eyes gleamed with youthful remembrance. "Um, huh," he said, "um, huh. So."

Michael moved to the door.

"Jest a minute, my boy," said the former petty boss. "You can do somethin' great for me. This is it: I got one leg in the grave. In a few days I'll be follerin' my leg."

"Don't say that," said Michael. "You'll be up and around."

"I'll never see spring. But I won't be in a pauper's grave, that's certain. Now, I want some of the boys from the works to take this here medal and countersink it in my tombstone, right away, so's when I'm gone, all can see that I won it fair and square and that I *didn't* lose it."

Michael took Mr. Cabot's hand and the old man squeezed it. "God bless you," he said to Michael. "And don't forget, tell Leon to do a good job on my grave."

The petty boss died and was buried. He had two claims to immortality—the bronze medal, imbedded in a stone, and the distinction of having been the first boss of Michael Sinnott.

Michael had an opportunity to succeed the late Mr. Cabot at the boiler shop and on a piece-work basis. He turned down the offer. He said he was planning to leave for New York right away. He so informed his father. Perhaps he might have stayed a time longer in East Berlin, because of his great affection for his mother. But a more or less stormy scene caused him to decide otherwise.

Michael said at dinner that he was going to change his name to "Sennett."

"For God's sake, why?" asked Papa Sinnott.

"Well," said the son, "when I go on the stage, I don't want to lay myself open to jokes."

"Whatcha talkin' about?" the father asked. "You gone crazy?"

"You remember how I used to get in fights over my name?" Michael said. "You know very well how many fights we had when me and my brothers used to go to the parochial school at Point de Tremble. Not that I minded the fights. But what I *didn't* like was the jokes—all the kids yellin' at us: 'Look! Here comes the three S'nott brothers!' Well, Papa, I can't take a chance like *that* when I go on the stage."

The elder Sinnott rose. "Not good enough for yah, eh? The good old Irish name Sinnott's not good enough!"

"It's plenty good," said Michael. "But not for stage purposes."

"All right," said the father. "All right. Go ahead. Go to New York and ruin yourself. I'm *glad* you're changin' your

name to Sennett, or whatever it is. Then nobody'll ever throw it up to me that my son's a ham."

Michael left East Berlin in the forepart of the year 1906. He demanded of the world that it recognize him henceforward as Mack Sennett.



## Chapter 4

### TO A LOOKING-GLASS

**M**ACK SENNETT strutted into the West Forty-third street boarding house of Madam Mamie Oakes, ex-wardrobe mistress of the *Black Crook* company. She saw a very cocky fellow who weighed one hundred and eighty pounds and was almost six feet tall. Her practiced eye took in his dark hair, brown eyes and ruddy complexion with the quick appreciation of a woman facing the Indian summer of her libido.

Madam liked him at once. He reminded her of John L. Sullivan, the pugilistic champion, whose savage nature she had charmed with sentimental ditties played on the zither. That had been a long time ago and before her knight had embraced the canvas at New Orleans.

Madam Mamie wore an auburn wig, said to have been given her by Boss Tweed for services that were political. She took great pride in this peach-colored transformation and shampooed it once a week with benzine. The artificial top-knot was familiar to Broadwayites, not a few of whom had skipped her boarding house without paying their bills. Such dead-beats regarded the sheen of Madam's auburn periwig as a godsend; they could see it three blocks away and in time to deploy to saloons and skulk until Madam flounced past. The behavior of these ingrates did not make Madam cynical. She played her zither and told stories of gallant spear-bearers of the *Black Crook* era.

The sentimental madam was stirred when Mr. Sennett sang to her accompaniment on the lap-lute. She interested some friends in his talent. They procured for him a job in the choir of the Baptist church, where John D. Rockefeller, Sr., was a communicant.

A story is told—apocryphal perhaps—concerning the first service graced by Mack Sennett's stormy bass. The choir had rendered Mr. Rockefeller's favorite hymn, "Passing By." It is said that the tsar of the oil wells mistook the Sennett rumbles for meteorological disturbances and whispered to a retainer: "Did you bring an umbrella?"

Mr. Sennett received a dollar for each church session and fifty cents bonus for funerals. On weekdays he walked up and down Broadway, looking for additional vocal work. He sometimes stood for half an hour gazing at the posters of

the Metropolitan Opera House. He often loitered near the stage door. Once, on a rainy afternoon, he fancied that the managing director had waved to him. He lapsed again into obscurity when he realized that the great man was hailing a hansom cab.

Mr. Sennett was an ambitious and open-minded fellow, the kind immortalized in the prose of Horatio Alger (except that he drank beer and chewed tobacco). He was slow to learn that two or three of Madam Mamie's guests were scarlet women.

Despite the careful tutelage of Amos Cabot and the case-history of fat Zelda, Sennett was singularly naïve when in scented company. He was unduly suspicious of men and their motives, but charmingly blind to the wiles of hussies.

The lady who liked Mr. Sennett best in Madam Mamie's caravansary was Miss Lucile Howey. This manhandled hoyden had a reputation for being hard-boiled and entirely commercial. Yet her latent emotions came to a simmer when she met the new boarder, a down-to-earth Adonis. Perhaps Madam's zither and Sennett's voice contributed to Lucile's romantic renaissance. She experienced a sudden nostalgia for the Ohio cross-roads and the farm she had believed too circumscribed for her talents.

Lucile and Mack became good friends. They met in her sitting-room for abstemious visits. Lucile spoke of birds and flowers and many other things, but neglected to mention Mr. Volpi. Either this was a plain oversight or Lucile saw no

reason for reference to one who acted as her amatory agent in the world outside the boarding house. Mr. Volpi collected a percentage of her receipts, and, if need be, went her bail in night court.

Mack and Lucile were having a platonic chit-chat in her room one evening. Mr. Sennett's mood was rich in anecdote of the boiler works. He rocked complacently in his chair and recalled many adventures. Autobiographical conversations have a way of meandering, and Mr. Sennett's recital included such remote events as his birth. In fact, he had just informed Lucile that he had weighed twelve pounds at the start of life when a hammering on the door halted Mack's memoirs. Lucile became uneasy.

"I hope I locked that door," she whispered. "Nix rocking."

Lucile's hope was unfounded. Mr. Volpi, her entrepreneur, opened the door and stood there quivering like a tuning-fork. His short stature made the razor which he held seem much longer than every-day cutlery. He was as pale as a chemise on the clothesline.

Mr. Volpi entered the room. "Free love, eh?"

Mr. Sennett rose from his rocking-chair. "Who are you, neighbor?"

Lucile threw herself against her solicitor's shirt-front. "Don't make a scene, honey. Madam Mamie's sleepin'."

Mr. Volpi shoved his client aside, nicking his own wrist



with the razor. He began to scream. "So this's why no money's come in the last week! A philanthropist, eh?"

Mr. Sennett was mystified. He knew he could whip ten such impresarios in a rough-and-tumble, but somehow the open razor and bubbles of blood on Mr. Volpi's wrist had a sinister effect on him.

"Who's this fellow, Lucile? Your uncle?"

Once again Lucile hurled herself on Mr. Volpi. "Go 'way, honey. Madam Mamie's asleep, I tell you."

"Well," said Mr. Volpi, through his teeth, "youse won't cheat on me no more, you smirkin' hay-shaker!"

Lucile clung to her agent like the lass in the *Rock of Ages* picture. She applied a female version of the half-nelson as he began to circle the room. Mr. Volpi cut great Harlem rainbows in the air. The gas light made the razor glisten like a broadsword.

"I'm goin' to cut both your hearts out an' hang 'em on your noses to dry," said Mr. Volpi. "Leggo my neck."

"Control yourself, honey," said Lucile. "Mr. Sennett merely lives in this house. He's a gentleman."

Mr. Volpi finally wrestled himself free of his protégée. He began to close in on Mr. Sennett. "Get ready for a funeral!"

Mack wheeled. He made for the door and dashed down the stairs. Mr. Volpi followed him, howled and brandished his barbershop side-arm. The whole household was roused. Madam Mamie had been giving her wig a benzine dip. She emerged from quarters to see both gentlemen reach the

street. She was unable to say a word and stood gaping. Her transformation wobbled in her hand. Madam looked like a bald brakeman trying to flag a through train.

Pedestrians and newsboys joined in the fun outside the boarding house. They followed and cheered as at a regatta. The race lasted for twelve blocks. Mr. Sennett maintained a lead of about one length. Fortunately entrepreneurs are notoriously short-winded, due to their sedentary habits. Mr. Volpi got a side ache and collapsed in the arms of a policeman in Seventh Avenue. Mr. Sennett was so relieved to have escaped a set of Heidelberg scars that he refused to prefer charges.

The beer was good at Kid McCoy's Rathskeller under the Casino Theater. Actors, playwrights, politicians and other Broadway mandarins patronized the noted pugilist's bar. Occasionally some visitor from the underworld wandered in and became brave with alcohol. Mr. McCoy kept a rubber mat in front of the bar, so that unclubby customers would not suffer fractured skulls when knocked down. Gyp the Blood, a gun-fellow afterward involved in the murder of gambler Rosenthal, was one of the rubber-mat casualties. He had threatened to shoot Mr. McCoy—a social and tactical error.

Mr. Sennett decided on the McCoy establishment as a place to make theatrical connections. It was there that he became acquainted with the lesser Hamlets of New York. A

few bits in the drama came his way, among them a two-line part in a play called *The Boys of Company B*. Citizen John Barrymore and Miss Frances Ring (sister of Blanche and wife of Thomas Meighan) were the leads in that offering. These players were excellent artists and the play was popular. It had the everlasting virtue of not compelling the public to think. Even in that day audiences were opposed to mental inconvenience.

Mr. Barrymore is unable, try as he may, to recall the Sennett début. So it is to be presumed that Mack did not bump into or trip up the principals during the run of *The Boys of Company B*. If it were not for the elephantine memory of Ken McGaffey, publicity man for the drama in question, notice of Mr. Sennett's first appearance might have escaped posterity. The man himself will not testify in regard to his thespic baptism. He rolls up his eyes in a coy manner, changes the subject and behaves altogether as if that baptism had been accompanied by shopworn fruit and mellow legumes.

For those who crave incidental facts (after the manner of a lady in Brockton, a highly respectable and no doubt conscientious correspondent who sometimes accuses me of short-changing her in this respect) I hasten to set down that *The Boys of Company B* was the work of Rida Johnson Young, ex-wife of James Young. Mr. Young became a director of the cinema and the husband of Clara Kimball Young.

To return to Kid McCoy's historic saloon, an agreeable port of call, we find Mr. Sennett, tired from a day of stage-door loitering and on the lookout for *any* sort of work. It was here that he found an opportunity temporarily to become a house painter and decorator. De Wolf Hopper, foster father of *Casey at the Bat*, wanted his eight-room apartment at the Hotel Buckingham done over. His regular contractor was in Tombs Prison, awaiting trial for wife-beating, and Mr. Hopper was most anxious to have the work done.

He sized up the muscular Mack Sennett and asked if he knew how to paint the inside of a house.

"I was practically born with a paint brush in my hand," said Mack.

They went to the Hopper apartment, where the actor exhibited materials and brushes gathered by the now imprisoned contractor. Mr. Hopper offered to pay four dollars for the job.

"I only want seven of the eight rooms painted," said Mr. Hopper. "Just leave the dining-room alone. You see the pictures painted on the walls? They were done by one of my dearest friends. They've got to stay as is. Remember."

Mr. Hopper left for the Long Island home of a friend and said he would be back next evening to inspect the work. "Be *sure* and don't paint the dining-room," he said. "It's a souvenir."

Mr. Sennett had never before held a paint brush. He smeared the kitchen and imagined he was going well. He for-

got his instructions and painted the dining-room. The next afternoon, and while he was gauming Mr. Hopper's library (including the backs of books) the great actor returned. Mr. Sennett could hear him cursing with a voice which, for sheer resonance, outdid his own.

When the world's foremost reciter of the epic of Mudville saw that his sacred dining-room had been daubed, he blew like a bull-whale. Mr. Sennett, himself spattered like a Piute medicine man, debated whether to fight or run. He elected to stand his ground and insist he was an experienced painter. He needed the four dollars.

Mr. Hopper charged into the library, noticed his ruined books and yelled: "They got the wrong painter in jail!"

"I want my money," said Sennett. "Give me my money and I'll go quietly."

"You're not a painter," said Mr. Hopper. "You're a vandal."

Mr. Sennett threw down his brush. "I'm a singer," he said. "The same as you are. Maybe better."

Mr. Hopper was unable to say anything other than: "Oh, God!"

He settled for three dollars. Some years later he worked for Producer Mack Sennett.

Raymond Hitchcock was one of the stars who afterward graced Mack's motion-picture payroll. Sennett met him on

the long Broadway rounds. Sennett had applied for a job as chorus man in *King Dodo* at Daly's Theater. The music director approved him because of his big voice. But when the dance director got hold of him, his destiny seemed to be just the opposite of Napoleon's. He had more power than grace and couldn't keep in step. The fancy marches made him self-conscious.

In this particular show, the music and dance directors were analyzing the Sennett talent when Mr. Hitchcock arrived to sit on the sidelines. He watched the locomotion for a time, then spoke to the stage manager :

"Who's the bumpkin with two left feet?"

The stage manager consulted a memorandum. "It says, 'Sennett.' 'Mack Sennett.' "

Mr. Hitchcock whispered to the stage manager, who informed Mr. Sennett : "I don't think you'll do."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, I don't think we need as many men as we have."

Mr. Sennett fancied that some of the company tittered. He went over to Mr. Hitchcock and said : "You may be working for me some day."

Mack wrote home that he was doing well, but the fact was that he had to take all manner of small jobs. In one of his optimistic letters he scrawled :

"Dearest Mamma :

"I know how awful prejudiced Papa is about music, but he

will be proud of me yet. I'm sorry the church where I sing isn't Catholic, but am sure you will excuse it when I say it is a big opportunity. Why, only last Sunday I met a Professor Waldemar who has studios in Carnegie Hall. He has offered to teach me for nothing. That is, he says he will take me on 'speculation,' and when I get a job with the opera or theater, he will take out a part of my earnings to repay him. Better not tell Papa about Professor Waldemar just yet, as he is so prejudiced against these men who devote their life to helping the voices of others. I was pretty sorry to hear of Signor Fontana's death. He was a fine gentleman and would have been so proud of me."

Mr. Sennett had appeared with little success in several musical comedies and operettas, including *The Chinese Honeymoon*, *Floradora* and *Princess Chic*. It was the same old story. He could uphold the bass against ten baritones and twelve tenors, but his dancing would have shamed Amos Cabot.

One day the dance director of *Princess Chic* called upon Mack to "rehearse" in the presence of the entire cast. After he had failed to master a routine, Mack was required to stand by while an effeminate gentleman of the troupe pranced out and did the nimblest sort of fandango. Mr. Sennett thereupon passed some comment as to the dancer's ladylike manners. Mack was fired.

He was very sad as he broke the news to Madam Mamie. "I don't lisp," he said, "and I guess I can't dance, either."

That same night the boarders at Madam Mamie's were in a panic. Madam had been cleaning her wig as usual with benzine. The fluid caught fire and Madam with it. Flames cloaked her as she ran through the hall. Like the ancient fire-bearing foxes, she touched off everything in her path. The window curtains, portières and other furnishings began to burn. Mr. Sennett finally caught the landlady and rolled her in a rag rug. The fire department subdued the flames elsewhere. Mr. Sennett's hands were scorched and the sleeves of his best coat singed.

Not only had Madam lost her wig, but her brows and lashes now were gone. She looked like a senile coot. She recovered after three weeks in bed, and although it was almost certain that friction and nothing else had started the benzine burning, she always insisted that Mr. Volpi had left a lighted cigarette in the kitchen. She ordered that little agent never to come inside her house again.

The boarding-house fire caused Mr. Sennett to delay his appointment at the Carnegie Hall studios of Professor Waldemar. When he got a new coat he made another date and finally appeared for his free lesson.

Mr. Sennett was impressed as he entered the professor's dignified reception room. A very efficient male secretary asked him to sit on a divan upholstered in horsehair. Opposite where he sat was a cheval-glass which reflected his



brooding face and tense figure. He could feel the artistic grandeur of this rendezvous of the muses.

As he waited there came a great and golden voice from the professor's sanctum. It was by far the best male voice Mr. Sennett had ever heard.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"That?" said the secretary. "Well, my friend, that is a very great artist you're listening to. A very, very great artist, indeed."

"What's his name?"

The secretary was eloquent. "An artist like that doesn't come every day. No, sir. This man works morning, night and noon to achieve perfection."

"Don't you know what his name is?"

The secretary was licking an envelope containing a bill. "Yes, sir. This man thinks enough of his God-given voice to practice six hours a day. Why, he studied two years in London, two in France, three in Germany and two and a half in Italy."

Mr. Sennett gave up trying to learn the name. "Is he some rich man's son?"

The secretary was pained. "Ah, no. No. No. No. He's an artist to his finger tips. The world means nothing to him. Just his art."

"Where does he sing? The Metropolitan?"

The secretary had found some dandruff on his lapel.

"Just listen to how he handles that soft-toning. An artist, every inch of him—a son of St. Cecilia."

"How does he manage to eat?"

"He sings."

"Where?"

The secretary was very solemn. "Up in the Bronx. At a restaurant."

"How much do they pay him?"

"He gets a dollar a day."

Mr. Sennett got up and went to the cheval-glass and looked at himself. He bowed, after the manner of Signor Fontana.

The secretary was slightly confused as he heard the young man say to the glass:

"Good-bye, opera. It ain't for you, Mack!"

He left the studio and went to his room at Madam Mamie's. He wrote a short letter home:

"Dearest Mamma: I think Papa was right about singing."

He never again took vocal lessons.

## *Chapter 5*

### THE BROADWAY GONDOLIER

**A** CHANCE reading of a news item dealt a second blow to Mack Sennett's musical ambitions—or what remained of them.

The public prints quoted Bishop Warren A. Candler of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. He had launched an attack on John D. Rockefeller, the elder. The good bishop had risen among his fellow prelates in an Atlanta conference to assert that the one-million-dollar gift proposed by Mr. Rockefeller for the discovery of a cure for hookworm was a slander and an outrage on the South. He called it a vermifuge fund, and shouted:

“Don't be taken in by it.”

Sennett was absorbing this news item at Kid McCoy's

Rathskeller as the proprietor was boxing with the last fly of summer. Mack asked the Kid, one of Fistian's foremost scholars, the meaning of "vermifuge." The conqueror of Champion Tommy Ryan nailed a groggy fly against a bar-mirror.

"Ha," he said. "Ha, I belted him out. With the left, too. Ha!" He made snorting sounds and wrinkled his brow. "Vermifuge? Vermifuge? It's a Spanish phrase, meaning to cook up a lie. Imagine, a fly in November! Ha."

One of Mr. Sennett's outstanding characteristics was never to accept any man's opinion as final. He didn't pretend to be a savant himself, nor was he quick to admit infallible knowledge in another without painstaking verification. He sometimes collected as many as twenty verdicts on any subject, large or small, then retired within himself to consider, ponder, weigh and analyze in a manner afterward perfected by Mr. Theodore Dreiser.

Somehow, he didn't think that "vermifuge" was what Kid McCoy declared it to mean. It might be Spanish. But he doubted it. He was a great doubter. It had a French sound. He had grown up in a Quebec community where a kind of French was spoken almost exclusively. At the Point de Tremble school he had been required to debate in French. Yes, it sounded French to Mack.

He asked several Rathskeller customers concerning the good bishop's idiom. The replies were numerous but unconvincing. Finally he braved the erudite De Wolf Hopper,

whose inherent good nature had not allowed him to be vindictive about Sennett's botchy paint-job.

"'Vermifuge,' my boy, is both adjective and substantive, meaning in the former case the causing of the expulsion of worms; in the latter, it means an anthelmintic; but need we go into that? I'm glad Louis Mann isn't here to contradict me. Let's have a beer."

Mr. Sennett was considering. "Worms," he said. "Worms."

He then announced to Mr. Hopper that he was about to resign from the Rockefeller choir. "There's no future in it. If John D. can give a million dollars for worms, then he ought to raise the pay of the choir."

Mr. Hopper nodded. "Devotion to the muse is a precarious business. Why, did you know that the great composer, Bach, got only a barrel of herring a year for playing the organ in a German church?"

"No," said Mr. Sennett, "I never did."

"And did you know," continued Mr. Hopper, "that the divine Handel received less than five quid a month for similar harmonic drudgeries in England?"

After he had learned that both masters were dead he disregarded the statement that their music lived. "Why didn't somebody tell me all this before?"

Mr. Sennett went to choir practice that night and resigned from Mr. Rockefeller's service. His next and last

professional venture in the musical field was with a quartet, *The Happy Gondoliers*.

Business was slow for these warblers. Their talents were called upon sporadically at Elks' clubs and Moose picnics. Mr. Sennett suggested to the manager, Mr. Vogel, that they buy four police uniforms and re-name themselves *The Singing Cops*.

"That's out," said Mr. Vogel. "What'd we buy the uniforms with? Nix. We already got velvet jackets and oars. Sink or swim, we're *Gondoliers*."

Sennett had a passion for police uniforms and brass buttons. In fact, he had been on the point of joining the police force, but learned that it took a long time before a patrolman could hope to rise to a sergeantcy. Once he had portrayed a gendarme on the stage and had played the rôle with such gusto that a director had uttered a word of restraint.

The *Gondoliers* were standing at the corner of Thirty-ninth street and Broadway one December day when an unexpected offer was made them. It was fitting that this great opportunity came while they were conversing beside a program poster adorning the façade of the Metropolitan Opera House. The poster announced Enrico Caruso in *Tosca*.

A brother Elk approached Mr. Vogel and gave him the office. The stranger, it appeared, had heard the *Gondoliers* at a Brooklyn benefit. He said he was manager of a small

vaudeville house across the bridge. Would the boys appear there for a week? Or were they too busy?

The deal was made, but Mr. Vogel was so excited that he forgot to ask the brother Elk for carfare. After the benefactor had disappeared, Mr. Vogel took a pencil and began to indulge in arithmetic on the Caruso poster. He was adding up a column of figures when a policeman nudged him with a nightstick.

"Hey, mug!" said the officer. "Whatcha doin'? Defacin' public prop'ty?"

"I was just going over my expense account," said Mr. Vogel.

The officer inspected the poster to make sure that nothing un-American or obscene was there, then told the *Gondoliers* to move on. They started south.

"I guess we gotta *walk* to Brooklyn," said Mr. Vogel. "We'll pick up our jackets and oars on the way. *Allez oup!*"

"You see," said Sennett, "if we had police uniforms we wouldn't have to carry them big oars and get kidded while we walk along the street. We could ride free on a car."

In December of 1908, Mr. Sennett had big news for the *Gondoliers*. They were to have a tryout with a burlesque company. They got their oars and jackets and went to the theater in Seventh Avenue, full of beer and hope. At the close of the audition, the burlesque manager hired Mr. Sennett but said he didn't want the other *Gondoliers*.

"Mr. Vogel," said Sennett, "if you had bought some

cops' uniforms, I think you could have made the grade. So long."

Mr. Sennett's first assignment was to play the hind legs of a horse. The man who portrayed the front legs was temperamental. He objected when Mr. Sennett, as the rear end, tried to do all the work.

"He's gone ham on me," said Mr. Front Legs. "He's tryin' to hog the whole act."

After some study of the situation, Mr. Sennett decided he was too important to remain as the hind end of a horse.

"I want to play a cop part," he told the manager.

It was several weeks before such a part fell his way. He was very happy. His job was to appear in an act featuring two eccentric comedians and a soubrette. A description of the act and the presentation of its continuity is a distressing task. Yet, the scenario is no worse than some of the modern screeds on which Hollywood authors use gold-tipped ostrich plumes for quills. And it is typical of the comedy nest in which were hatched the slap-stick eggs of Mack Sennett's success.

The eccentric comedians came on stage with a large telescope and a sign: "Five Cents a Look." Mr. Sennett, dressed in his beloved police uniform and carrying a billy as big as a baseball bat, stood watching the antics of the comedians. Then the soubrette, in tights, strolled on and was immediately interested in the telescope.

This lady was built according to specifications of that clas-



sic decade: big legs, plenty of curves, hour-glass waist and billowing hips. She was beef, down to the heels.

"Boys, what is it?" the girl would say.

"We're selling looks at the stars," was the reply. "Five cents a look."

The girl paid her nickel, then leaned over to look through the instrument. She would report that she couldn't see anything. The men would reassure her and describe the planets she was sure to see. Meanwhile they would maneuver her hips into position, so that Policeman Sennett could whack her with his club. Of course she saw stars for the black-out.

It was while serving in the burlesque ranks that Sennett heard of a new industry which was being pooh-poohed by the theatrical grand viziers of Broadway. This strangely appealing business consisted of the making and marketing of dramatic, comic and novelty scenes done on celluloid tape and shipped in tin cans to exhibitors.

This business was born on February 5, 1861, when Inventor Coleman Sellers put a series of prints on a paddle-wheel device (the Sellers Kinematoscope). But photographic illusion of motion did not stir the country appreciably until after Thomas Alva Edison had devised his black box of spools and fifty-foot celluloid tapes in 1889. This was the Edison Kinetoscope. The first real film story—*The Great Train Robbery*—came in 1903.

All these matters have been admirably and exhaustively treated by Historians Terry Ramsaye and Ben Hampton.

We must mention, however, that in 1909, when Mack Sennett decided to investigate the situation, the peep-show era was definitely at an end and the movies had begun to sweep the land with the force of a religion.

The motion-picture theater, however lowly and uncomfortable, had supplanted the shooting galleries and penny arcades. The names of D. W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, Thomas H. Ince, Blanche Sweet, Florence Lawrence, Lillian and Dorothy Gish were about to be noised in a hundred lands. It was a transitional period from costly and selective entertainment to cheap mass entertainment.

Although theatrical men jeered at the movies and said the fad would last a year or less, many of them were afraid of the shadows. They advised actors not to risk their reputations by appearing in these fly-by-night flickering clap-traps.

When Sennett heard that professionals might hope to receive as high as five dollars a day in the movies, he was interested. He found out which was the leading company—Biograph. He inquired who was the man in charge—Old Man McCutcheon.

McCutcheon was the director who had made the pioneer story-picture—*The Great Train Robbery*, with G. M. ("Broncho Billy") Anderson as its star, back in 1903.

Certain historians state that Mack Sennett applied for a

job at the Edison studio in the Bronx. He denies this and says he went to Old Man McCutcheon at Biograph. That studio was at No. 11 East Fourteenth street, an ancient brownstone mansion reminiscent of satin knee-breeches and the minuet.

He arrived there on the twenty-ninth anniversary of his birth, January 17, 1909. A job was his present. He wrote home to Mamma Sinnott: "I've landed big and am on my way to fame. Be sure and tell Papa."



## Chapter 6

### WALKS AND TALKS WITH THE MASTER

PIONEER McCUTCHEON'S health failed and David Wark Griffith emerged from the ranks for a directorial début. He was assigned to make *The Adventures of Dolly*, the story of a damsel in distress. This rickety offering started Griffith toward his place as the great anointed of the silver sheet. The production also introduced Arthur Johnson, first "matinée idol" of the movies.

Little was expected of Griffith's maiden effort. The piece was one of those hare-brained epics sired by literary hams. A tribe of gypsies pounced on *Dolly*, crammed her into a barrel, lifted the barrel to a wagon and drove off across the shingle of Sound Beach, Connecticut.

Many things happened while *Dolly* was aging in the wood.

Her barrel fell into a river, traveled over a falls, shot a rapids and eventually reached a sylvan backwater, from which it was fished by a group of rustic gossoons.

This picture was unveiled for a fee of ten cents at Keith & Proctor's theater near Union Square. It proved two things: that a barrel was a durable vessel and that Griffith could do much with little. His employers rewarded him with a one-year contract at forty-five dollars a week and a royalty. By the end of the year he was earning more than three times the guarantee.

He had come to Biograph about a year previous to the *Dolly* assignment, and had been known as Lawrence Griffith, poet, scenarist and actor. He was mild-mannered but intense, industrious and artistically resourceful.

The three directorial leaders to leave their imprint on these trail-blazing days—the triumvirate of D. W. Griffith, Thomas H. Ince and Mack Sennett—resembled combatants whose weapons seemed invincible. Griffith performed with a rapier, Ince with a saber and Sennett with a bed-slat. Optimists of the publicity departments subsequently turned to the world of art and letters for comparisons indicative of their bosses' stature. Griffith became the "da Vinci of the Screen," Ince the cinema's "Rodin," and Sennett the "Molière of the Movies."

Griffith was the son of Brigadier Jacob W. Griffith of the Confederate Army. He was born at La Grange, Kentucky, January 22, 1880, five days after the mundane de-

livery of Mack Sennett, and about a year and a half before Ince inhaled the pedigreed air of Newport, Rhode Island.

Griffith attended public school, then played stock in Brooklyn for several seasons. Afterward he joined James K. Hackett's company. He underwent an up-and-down novitiate as a screen actor and weathered a grim period of quill-driving and bench-dusting on primitive sets. Was he a good writer? He thought so. Was he a good actor? He thought so. Was he a great director? Name a better one!

Within his first year as director, Griffith had laid the groundwork for a new screen technique. His films had quality, movement and suspense. A divine borealis played about the Griffith brow. The fledgling cormorants of the industry squawked his praises—the same rapacious birds that in after years gnawed at his vitals.

Griffith introduced a greater number of cinematic practices than did any other three innovators. He was a well-spring of ideas. He had the will to breach the wall of motion-picture taboo and prejudice, that sullen barrier against which countless skulls have behaved like pumpkins. He became a messiah during a period when patent fights, film thefts, sabotage and business skullduggery laid less daring fellows by the heels.

What Edison had done for the mechanics, Griffith did for the art of the movies. He articulated the mechanical media and bent them to his flair. The "cut-back" was his—a method of reverting to the past and bringing it into the present.

He formulated systems of editing a film. He experimented with light and shade. He used orchestras to rouse actors' emotions while a film was being made (Blanche Sweet, in *Judith of Bethulia*, 1913, was the first one stirred in this fashion). He brought Mary Pickford to the screen (*Violin Maker of Cremona*, 1909) and developed many others who soon were to perch upon the celluloid Parnassus. And when he paid \$175,000 for the motion-picture rights to a play (*Way Down East*, 1920) the doubting Thomases thought the Master had gone datt.

It is probable that Griffith didn't introduce *all* the devices credited to him. The "close-up" may have been the stroke of his veteran camera man, Billy Bitzer. But Griffith used the tools of his craft as none had before and as few since have done. The big-wigs had ague when they first saw a Griffith "close-up" in the projection room.

"It's murder," said one mogul. "Whoever heard of a face with no legs in sight?"

Griffith said: "Museums are full of masterpieces with nothing but large and arresting faces. If the face tells what I mean it to tell, an audience will forget all about legs, arms, liver and lungs."

As he advanced nearer to his *The Birth of a Nation* triumph, the Master revealed that he was no shrinking violet. He lapped up praise. For adverse criticism he had a superior disdain. He became aloof and lived much within himself,



looked out windows for long periods, took solitary walks and made Mount Olympus his penthouse.

A publicity man who had been receiving \$150 a week once asked Griffith for a job. The Master offered him \$35. When the press agent demurred, Griffith said:

"Yes, I know what you've been getting. But it's worth a lot more than money to be working for *me*."

Prodigal in effort and materials for productions, Griffith often pinched on the salaries of his people. He permitted Wallace Reid to get away from him, due to lack of generosity in salary.

Griffith's sudden and wholesale revisions of films startled the workmen of that day. He frequently made drastic changes within an hour or less of a pre-view.

When he had finished *Intolerance*, it was decided to take the picture to Pomona for a tryout. The opus had cost nearly two million dollars. Griffith had shrunk *three hundred thousand feet* of negative to thirteen thousand feet for presentation. Joseph Carl Breil had composed a special musical score and the orchestra had rehearsed the picture and the score together.

Just before the Pomona pre-view, Griffith brought out his scissors for a final trim. He eliminated great chunks of celluloid, seemingly at random. The results were amazing.

When the part depicting the Savior first reached the screen, the musicians were playing "In the Good Old Summertime." And the romance between Miss Mae Marsh and

Bobby Harron was unreeling to the rhythms of "Lead Kindly Light."

*Intolerance* arrived in 1916, and after *The Birth of a Nation*. It failed at the box-office and provided the greatest commercial anti-climax in film history. This contrapuntal litany, rich in experimental work, made the citizens feel as though the Master had betrayed them. They believed Mr. Griffith was like the swain in Publisher Hearst's favorite story, a Romeo who winked at his sweetheart in the dark. *He* knew what he was doing, but nobody else did.

The public wanted entertainment of the people, by the people and for the people. The Master had begun to deal in parables and had committed the blunder of trying to make his audience think. This inspired mistake is the basic reason for all crucifixions.

The history of the cinema indicates that a man will pay a dollar to get a dime's worth of entertainment, but will not part with a dime to get a dollar's worth of ideals. Such are the economic philosophies of the mass mind. Unfortunate intellectuals have tried to reverse this order and quite deservedly have been ridden out of town on rails, hooted by fishwives, hamstrung, saddled to ducking-stools, belly-banged and their beards dipped in horse-brine. The sovereign public's credo is that the most precious enlightenment shall not disturb a still more precious slumber.

Mankind sees fit to suppress the D. W. Griffiths, lest unbiassed thinking become prevalent. Truth and reason might

assume a dangerous popularity, like the eating of potatoes. The King of France wore a potato blossom in his lapel and his subjects straightway took to that vegetable with an almost lecherous zest. Once France had placed its polite seal on the tuber, a well-mannered world followed suit. The rest is history—wars, boundary disputes, assassinations and divorce.

Certain commentators would absolve the potato from blame in these matters. Yet how can they explain the sin of good health which the potato undoubtedly fosters? Good health makes men want to fight and steal one another's wives.

One hesitates even to think of the chaos, were some modern prince or dictator suddenly to emulate the King of France and appear in public with the flower of truth on his lapel. But that cannot be. We are essentially a sane people, and, thank Heaven, did we lose our senses entirely, a vigilant educational system and a band of faithful reformers are eternally on the job, the former to nurture mediocrity and the latter to safeguard us from intellectual light.

One of Poet Griffith's major faults was his candor, the crime of having opinions and sometimes expressing them. Sagacious henchmen more than once saved him from a premature crucifixion by acting as buffers between him and the customers.

A minor example of his occasional bluntness, born of ar-

tistic ennui, pertained to the filming of *The Birth of a Nation*. He had photographed the cotton-field sequences of that epic in the Imperial Valley of California. The local Chamber of Commerce had exerted itself to co-operate with him. When he had concluded the shooting, and the cotton fields were put in tin cans, he was tired. Too tired to babble. The Chamber asked if he would write a testimonial, something to be included in booster literature. Griffith composed this whimsy and handed it wearily to his publicity man:

"It's a shame ever to take this country away from the rattlesnakes."

The Griffith press agents, however, amended the thumbnail philippic, and when it reached the Chamber, the members were elated by the eulogistic phrases.

Mack Sennett began work as an extra for Biograph at least two years before Griffith became king of the honkytonk gods of shadowland. Yet, Mack felt the "presence" right off—he was a bloodhound for talent, deny it who will. He watched Griffith's every maneuver, and for a long time kept his eyes and ears open, his mouth shut—as recommended by Amos Cabot in boiler-shop homilies.

His taciturnity gave Mack's fellow-workers an impression that he was a sulker. When he ponders anything, his face grows solemn, his heavy brows beetle. His brooding periods evidently annoyed Griffith's wife, Linda Arvidson. Miss Arvidson, a talented and gracious lady, at that time

was secretly wedded to the Master. In her reminiscences, she described Sennett as a "grouch."

The memoirs of Mrs. Griffith appeared in 1925, at an hour when Mr. Sennett sat high upon a fantastic throne. He burned to the ears at remarks such as:

"Sennett never approved whole-heartedly of anything we did, nor how we did it, nor who did it. There was something wrong with all of us—even Mary Pickford."

He was quoted as having said of Princess Mary: "I don't see what they're all so crazy about her for—I think she's affected."

Sennett holds the highest opinion of Miss Pickford and acclaims her an extraordinary business woman as well as an artist. One of the first things he learned at Biograph was that Miss Pickford had literary leanings as well as thespic talents. He was amazed to find that she had sold several scenarios to the company for as much as fifteen dollars each.

He looked at Miss Pickford's fair young head, with its tumulus of curls. He decided that his own head, while not as fair, was larger. If saleable plots could originate in a little head, why not in a big one? He consulted Miss Pickford regarding the emoluments of literature.

"All you need is an idea," she said. "Then you put it down on paper."

"It looks like easy pickings," said Sennett.

"It's far from being hard," said Miss Pickford. "I sold two yesterday."

"You don't say so," said Sennett. "Well, I wonder if you'd help me get started?"

Little Mary replied she would be glad to help. Sennett then said: "Tell you what. You're a girl. They like you and you'd make a better salesman than me. I'll write some stories and the boss'll buy 'em from you."

Sennett gave Mary three scenarios next morning. "Take 'em to the editor while they're hot," he said, "and let it appear that you wrote 'em."

Miss Pickford submitted the stories. Mack waited anxiously for the verdict. That evening he cornered Mary. "What news?"

She seemed sad. "Very bad news. In fact, the worst."

"What did he say?"

She looked at him accusingly. "Well, the editor read your efforts, shook his head and was going to throw them into the wastebasket. But I stopped him."

Mr. Sennett swallowed hard. "He must have said *something*."

"Indeed, he did. He said: 'My dear girl, didn't you know that O. Henry has been writing quite a while?'"

"HMMMMMMM," said Sennett. "HMMMMMMM. I guess he was right. Maybe I should have changed them *some more*."

When assignments were slow coming his way, Mack managed to get in on story conferences. To do this he resorted to tricks such as carrying the camera to location. And when

Mr. Griffith sometimes offered a prize for an idea to fill out the remainder of a split-reel, Sennett invariably had a scenario concerning the police force. Many jokes arose concerning Sennett's craze for policemen.

Mack contrived to engage Griffith in conversation at every opportunity. This was not easy for most folk, but Sennett was ambitious and persistent. According to Miss Arvidson, Sennett found out that Griffith walked the twenty-three blocks between the studio and his home every night, and lay in wait at the corner of Broadway and Fourteenth street. She added:

"Then for twenty-three blocks he [Sennett] would have the boss all to himself and wholly at his mercy. Twenty-three blocks of uninterrupted conversation."

During these walks, Griffith answered Sennett's questions, gave advice and said the future of a director promised more than that of an actor.

Even the reminder of the great O. Henry did not deter Mack from trying to write scenarios. He had an idea that if one read the newspapers an inspiration might emerge. He was right. He evolved from one newspaper clipping a melodrama concerning a mother and three daughters (not *Little Women*) and handed the piece to Griffith. It was called *The Lonely Villa* and Miss Pickford appeared in the picture.

Sennett played bits with Flora Finch, Owen Moore, Flor-

ence Lawrence, Tony O'Sullivan, Florence Auer, Henry B. Walthall and others. He "got over" rather well in a picture titled *Father Gets in the Game*, in which he portrayed a Parisian roué. His first hit, however, seems to have been *The Curtain Pole*, a seven-hundred-and-fifty-foot comedy. This was a very long one for the pioneer period. It was made in the woods of Fort Lee, New Jersey, and appeared in February of 1909.

Sennett had worked hard to be "starred," and when, in the course of this comedy, it came time to wreck a series of fruit stands, he assaulted the stalls with boiler-maker's vim. His acting, like himself, was muscular.

Perhaps he was the happiest mortal alive one winter's day when snow fell in Central Park and his idea for a policeman's drama finally was *accepted*. Mr. Griffith changed its content materially and called it *The Politician's Love Story*. Furthermore, the Master put Sennett into it.

Unfortunately, Mack didn't appear as a policeman, and had to be content to be the star, clad in a high silk hat, Inverness cape and handle-bar mustache. Miss Arvidson and Arthur Johnson provided the romance, an element necessary to motion pictures of all time.

Miss Arvidson entertained a somewhat pessimistic view concerning the young man's destiny when she wrote in 1925:

"Like a grouchy poker player who kicks himself into



financial recuperation, Mack Sennett groused himself into success."

Once on the road to higher things, Sennett became congenial and comparatively talkative. He now had his feet on the first rung, and he was not a man to let go.

As his earnings increased, Sennett's desire for creature comforts mounted. In 1910 he was able to write home, promising Mamma a trip to New York. He told her he had moved from the boarding house to an apartment of his own. It was a sixth-floor walk-up and on a narrow court. He could see fairly well into the bedroom of an apartment across the court, where a comely lass resided. Of course, he did not include that fact in his letter home.



## *Chapter 7*

### NURSING A VIPER

**N**UMEROUS and conflicting legends portray Henry Lehrman's advent to the motion-picture industry. One historian (since committed to an asylum) maintains that the dapper Mr. Lehrman was a conductor on a cross-town tram in New York; that he resigned this shuttling job to pursue three peroxide blondes to the Biograph studio.

Another chronicler (a bigamist with a glass eye) confides that the bouncing Mr. Lehrman applied for a position as an actor and, as he was about to be thrown out, displayed a card labeled: "Monsieur Henri Lehrman, of Paris." He was put to work instantanè. The biased Herodotus explains this parenthetically:

"Americans so dote on foreign goods that Monsieur Lehr-

man's success depended solely on his ability to gibber in some European patois."

A writer of this stamp has no place in our society. The various legions of decency now in charge of motion pictures, literature and other moralistic diets should look into the matter at once. There not only is a grain of dangerous truth in the parenthetical remark quoted above, but undoubtedly a hidden sexual reference. How many untutored young women have come across this sentence concerning foreign goods and straightway gone off on a biological junket with some insincere Greek? We cannot be too wary of libidinous writers and their corrupt inkhorns.

The several 'versions of M. Lehrman's début are so confusing that we are reduced to Monsieur's own deposition regarding himself and his genesis. Mack Sennett declines altogether to testify. He does not choose to discuss M. Lehrman one way or another. A bare mention of the name sends the King of Comedy into a mauve funk. More is the pity, it plunges him into a brooding silence such as to weaken the morale of a biographer less inured than the present one to brushes with indignant fuglemen.

During these retreats, Mr. Sennett drinks quarts of black coffee, remains incommunicado and makes motions suggestive of an umpire calling third strikes. The inference persists that M. Lehrman was a heavy at the court of King Mack.

As the Hon. Alfred E. Smith used to say—after the band

had ceased playing "Sidewalks of New York"—let us look at the record.

M. Lehrman wasn't a product of France at all. He was born in Vienna, the home of the waltz and the *schnitzel*. A bright boy at school, he specialized in the study of sixteenth-century manners, morals and arts. When the movies invaded Austria, Henry promptly forgot waltzes, *schnitzels* and the sixteenth century and boarded the first available packet bound for America.

Arrived in New York, Lehrman became a violent motion-picture fan. The names of actors were not public property in 1908, but Lehrman knew them all by their faces and their legs. He liked to take a sack of peanuts to the nickelodeon and see the same show two or three times.

When chance offered itself, Lehrman became an usher at the Unique Theater. This was the first metropolitan show-house to charge ten cents for a motion-picture presentation.

One Monday evening, and with the last show in progress, M. Lehrman was standing at the rear of the narrow auditorium. He was watching the screen, whereon a drama called *Coney Island* was advancing to a fade out. It was a four-hundred-foot film and a successful effort in its day.

While M. Lehrman was appraising this film for the twentieth time, a patron engaged him in conversation. "You see a lot of these pictures, buddy; how does this one strike you?"

M. Lehrman was munching peanuts. "I think it's pretty fair—all but one character."

The stranger was interested. "That so? Well, how do you like the comedian?"

Monsieur was cracking a peanut inside a handkerchief, so as not to annoy the audience. "The fellow that plays the cop? He's the one I *don't* like. In fact, he smells up the joint."

The stranger cleared his throat. "That so? Well, *why* don't you like him? Because he's a cop?"

"No. Because he's a lunkhead. God knows he smells up the place a hundred per cent."

The stranger made bull-frog noises. "Well, well, now. A fresh kid, eh? Do you know who the gentleman is?"

"Even if it was Mansfield," said the usher, "he'd still be a bloomer. Can I get you a seat?"

"For your information," said the stranger, "that there comedian happens to be Mack Sennett."

"Have it your way," said M. Lehrman, "but it don't mean a thing to me."

"You're pretty loose with your talk," said the man. "I happen to be Mack Sennett."

The usher, temporarily deflated, looked through the gloom at Mr. Sennett. "Sure," he said. "I knew it all the time. I just wanted to see if you was conceited."

Mr. Sennett was suspicious. "That so? Well, I *thought* you'd change your tune."

"As a matter of fact," said M. Lehrman, "you walked away with this picture, and you know it."

Somewhat mollified, Mr. Sennett turned to leave the

theater. "Come over to the studio sometime and see me work. We're making a picture called *Nursing a Viper*."

Next day Lehrman called at Biograph. The door attendant said that Mr. Sennett was not expecting callers. M. Lehrman then resorted to strategy.

"I'm not a common ordinary visitor," he said. "I'm from the Pathé Company in France."

He was believed to the hilt and admitted. No sooner had he passed the door than he found himself hired as an extra and given a soldier's uniform and a heavy rifle.

The gallant monsieur knew a great deal about sixteenth-century manners but practically nothing in regard to twentieth-century grease-paint. He reported before the camera with a face smeared in the manner of De Wolf Hopper's apartment the time Sennett had decorated it.

Director Griffith examined Lehrman critically. "Go fix that make-up. This is not an Indian story."

After Monsieur had retired for a fresh paint job, Griffith said: "Claims he worked for Pathé, eh? He never worked for anybody."

Lehrman reappeared and Griffith ironically referred to him as "Pathé," a nickname which stayed with Monsieur. "Get in this chase scene, Pathé," Mr. Griffith said. "And don't look at the camera."

Pathé decided to perform conspicuously to atone for the blunder in making up his face. He was one of a company of soldiers who ran into a three-story building to "save the

day." After the troops had dashed inside, Pathé reappeared alone at an upper window and *leaped out!* In this astounding jump he carried his sixteen-pound rifle and a knapsack stuffed with rags. Fortunately he landed on the knapsack as he crashed to a balcony twenty feet below the window. The whole company was amazed at this unexpected business.

Griffith hastened to the balcony to ascertain how many bones had been broken. Monsieur looked up and smiled like a dying lover. Griffith then informed the daring soldier :

"You were outside the range of the camera!"

"Then put up the camera and let me do it again," said Lehrman.

Mr. Griffith communed with himself. "All right. But you must sign a paper absolving us from responsibility."

Pathé almost bit his tongue in two as he hit the balcony for a second crash. But he received a bonus for the feat. This, together with his salary for the day's work, earned him ten dollars. The great sum all but ruined Pathé. Never again would an ordinary wage satisfy his thirst. He suffered a temporary attack of a rush of wealth to the head—one of the most incurable of ailments.

After the ten dollars was spent, Pathé learned that kangaroo leaps were not needed every day. He had quit his job as an usher and reported every morning at Biograph, leaping and cavorting to attract attention. But no work materialized. Griffith directed as though Pathé did not exist. This indifference galled Monsieur, who regarded the art of



directing as a racket, one which anyone might learn in a week or two.

He watched Griffith and looked for directorial flaws. One day Griffith was rehearsing a sixteenth-century scene, in which William Russell played the part of an executioner. The sixteenth century—right up Pathé's alley!

Russell wielded a sword. Pathé had been taught that sword-toting in the sixteenth century was a privilege confined solely to the nobility. He finally worked up his courage and whispered into Griffith's ear:

"They didn't use swords, boss. Axes!"

Mr. Griffith did not pretend to hear Monsieur's criticism, but went ahead with the scene. Nevertheless, an axe presently appeared from some mysterious quarter. Then Mr. Griffith said:

"Bill, let's try it without the sword once."

Russell picked up the axe and repeated the action, but without much spirit. Actors love swords. An axe will never suit them. If there is one prop in all the paraphernalia of stage and screen that raises the blood-pressure of a Thespian, it is a sword. It makes him feel dauntless. Lacking an alternative, an actor would run his great-grandmother through the pancreas rather than forego the joy of brandishing a military skewer.

After the episode of the sixteenth-century axe-man, Griffith put Lehrman to work again. Pathé made suggestions from time to time and the Master began to take him out to

lunch. This attention flattered Pathé and made other actors jealous.

Sennett now began to take notice of the ex-usher. He asked Pathé to move into his apartment, an invitation which was accepted. Another resident of the Sennett flat was Del Henderson, leading man of Biograph's second company.

The Sennett apartment originally had cost Mack \$30 a month. To cut the overhead he sublet rooms to Pathé and Henderson. Mack reserved the front room for himself. Henderson occupied the second-best room, for which he paid Sennett \$16 a month. Sennett assigned the third and smallest chamber to Pathé.

"You can have it for \$2.50 a week," Sennett said, "but you'll have to cook our breakfasts."

Lehrman did not fancy being a chef and began to burn things so haphazardly that Sennett had to prepare the morning meals.

These three men devoted most of their spare time to talk of pictures. All three had native ability in the field. Henderson knew how they should be acted. Sennett had a fine critical sense and could foretell what the public would like and what it would not like. He was a dependable barometer, because he himself had the average man's amusement tastes. Lehrman soon demonstrated that he had a natural creative bent and a flair for story construction. The three men played a sort of make-believe game, pretending they were pro-

ducers. They looked forward to a day when they might step in and make pictures to suit themselves.

"I want to be a director," Sennett said to his lodgers. "That's where the future is. This ham acting is only a filler-in."

Sennett had his eye on a job held by Frank Powell, director of Biograph's second company. Each night he would ask Henderson, Powell's leading man:

"How's Powell's health tonight?"

"I think he's cracking up gradually," Henderson would report. "He can't last forever."

The Powell "crack-up" was not to come for many months, but the three men waited patiently. To be prepared for the Powell decline and fall, Sennett kept Lehrman working incessantly. At night he would bludgeon him for ideas, nor would he let Pathé go to sleep until some worth-while suggestion had been made. Sometimes they concocted a saleable scenario, and Mack would peddle it next day. Lehrman profited from these nocturnal sessions, for Sennett always handed over the entire proceeds of the sales to his guest. Mack was less interested in the money than in laying a foundation for fame.

The Sennett apartment gave on a narrow air-shaft, or court, which separated the building he lived in from another apartment house. This long court ended in a "V"-shaped *cul-de-sac*, with a window on either leg of the "V." Pathé

Lehrman's chamber looked out from one side of the "V" and commanded an unusually fine view of the windows aligned squarely along the sides of the court. He could see fairly well into Sennett's room and exceptionally well into the boudoir of the lady who roomed across the air-shaft from Sennett's bedchamber.

Pathé liked to sit there in the early morning and see what was going on.

One day in summer, and while Pathé was at his post of observation, he saw the shade of Sennett's room go half way to the top. Next he glimpsed Mack taking some exercises intended to preserve the contour of his big muscles. The Sennett face was hidden by the half-raised window shade. The lower part of his body was visible, from neck to knees.

After watching the Sennett gyrations for a time, Pathé turned his attention to the boudoir opposite Mack's. He noticed that the lady across the way also was inspecting the Sennett charms. She seemed pleased.

The Sennett group had been trying for several weeks to make this young lady's acquaintance, but with no success. They frequently paused while discussing picture plots to remark how sweet their neighbor seemed. They often wondered if the man who sometimes called on her were her brother. They could not be sure, because she was accustomed to close the window and draw the blind.

When Pathé saw how interested this lady was in the Sen-

nett calisthenics, he decided to capitalize, if possible, on his host's display. He got into his clothes hastily and waited until Mack let up on the body-building antics to go to the bathroom. Pathé made sure the coast was clear, then darted into Mack's room, put up the blind and stood there smiling and taking credit for the better torso.

The lady smiled back at Pathé. He made an appointment for that evening, restored the blind to its half-way mark and left the room. En route with Mack to the studio, Pathé's conscience wobbled a little when Sennett said:

"I'm going to get acquainted with that lady across the way tonight or bust. I got an awful urge for her."

When Sennett returned home that night, he decided to launch the great flirtation. He combed his hair carefully, put on a fresh shirt and tie and went to the window. He was astonished to see an ironing board spanning the air-shaft. One end of the board rested on his window sill, the other on the window sill of the sylph's bedroom.

While he was looking at this improvised bridge, he heard the giggling voice of her whom he would have enshrined as Juliet. Then he heard a voice very familiar to him, that of Pathé Lehrman. More, he could see clearly that the lady was wiggling in Monsieur's arms.

Mack's first impulse was to yell at the abandoned creatures. He thought better of it and pulled in the ironing board. Mr. Sennett stood there, brooding and a bit jealous. It was as though Juliet had been unfaithful. No. It was

Monsieur who had been unfaithful. In fact, *both* had been unfaithful.

As he watched this galling tableau, Sennett thought he heard a knocking at a door. Monsieur and his new mate also heard the knocking. It was at the lady's door! She slipped from Pathé's embrace and motioned for him to fly. He had had a similar idea, but when he got to the window, he saw no avenue of escape. He leaned over the sill, looking vainly for his drawbridge. It was what is known as a dilemma, with horns.

The lass was at the door, calling out lamely: "Just a minute, sweetheart. Wait till I slip something on, honey lamb."

The knocking became more pronounced. Honey Lamb had sledge-hammer fists. Amidst the din, with battering-ram blows falling on the door-panels and cries of "precious pie" and "lamb," Lehrman heard sardonic laughter. He looked across the gully to discover Mr. Sennett.

Pathé made windmill gestures. "For God's sake, Mack! The ironing board. Quick!"

Mr. Sennett shrugged. "Why don't you jump? That's how you got in pictures."

Monsieur's face had a drowned man's complexion. "Shove out the board, Mack. I think he's got a gun!"

"Jump, Pathé. If you fall I'll catch you."

It seemed that the man at the door was on the point of breaking it loose from its hinges. Pathé hesitated no longer.

He stepped back, closed his eyes as though in prayer, opened them, tensed his muscles, took a running start and jumped out the window. He barely seized the sill of Sennett's window and hung there, gasping like a punctured concertina. Mr. Sennett relented and drew Pathé to safety.

Pathé sat on the floor and Mack mercifully drew the shade. They could hear the lady across the way explain to her caller:

"I was in a bath and *couldn't* unlock the door. You're so impatient, honey pie."

The voice of a gentleman—a disciple of Sherlock Holmes no doubt—was heard. "You're pretty dry to of been in the bath. I would of swore I heard somebody in here with you."

Then the lady's voice in righteous challenge: "Why don't you look under the bed, pie?"

Then the man's: "And if you think I *ain't* goin' to look there, you're crazy."





## *Chapter 8*

### WESTWARD, HOI HOI

**H**OLLYWOOD occupies a site said to have been the habitat of the now extinct Cahuenga Indians. These interesting aborigines lived in lop-sided clay igloos and subsisted on grasshoppers. They were Digger Indians, the least intelligent natives known to American anthropology. Proudly indolent, steadfastly dumb and religiously filthy, the Cahuengas survived as long as they did because their enemies dared not approach within a mile of the mud domes, so violent were the olfactory reactions.

The Nez Perce Indians from the north used to wear a clothes-pin device on their noses when hunting near the Cahuenga villages. If lost in a fog, all a Nez Perce Nimrod need do to get his bearings was remove the nose-clamp

for a split-second, then run like a gossip. Their term for this sort of navigation—"Aremac! Aremac!"—literally means "dead reckoning." Linguists believe their use of the word "dead" had a much fuller implication than obtains in our maritime idiom. Concerning the Cahuengas, the Nez Perce Indians had a saying:

*"Heyt tusm eb sporiversus,"* or, as translated by Commissioner Eros Levan of the Carnegie Foundation: "Man composes—The Great Spirit decomposes. Ugh!"

The Cahuengas, however, had certain amazing abilities, which may reasonably be ascribed to the climate. Impotent of nostril, they possessed remarkably sharp ears, especially for gossip. It is claimed they actually could hear a tree rot. Not only trees, but themselves.

By some perverse code of manners, it was accounted impolite for one tribesman to say to another: "You look well today." The proper greeting was: "You look pretty rotten," or, "I hope you feel as rotten as you look."

Dumb as they seemed, this great race was smart enough to shun wedlock. They never had heard of the institution. The only thing regarded by them as immoral, or a source of infinite gossip, was for a man to dine with a woman in public. Where they slept, or how, was of no import. It was where and *with whom* they munched their grasshoppers that counted. A vestige of this quaint outlook is preserved in modern Hollywood. Indeed, one of the better Hollywood restaurants stands on the selfsame ground where a Cahuenga

sire strangled his daughter and her fiancé for dining where all could see. It would have got in the newspapers—had there been any among these people. All three principals in the tragedy had slept together amicably the night before the homicide.

The gentle Cahuengas were unfailing weather forecasters. It was to their advantage to excel in this respect. For, were it to rain, they suffered an involuntary bath. Also, it damaged their mud hovels, dwellings not a great deal more substantial than the mansions of present-day Hollywood. Concerning the rain, a great sachem, Erunam ("Buffalo Chip") Cahuenga, had a pithy saying:

*"Srosnec era punworg deb srettew,"* or, as so adroitly translated by Professor Enots Dloc of Mutorcs Seminary: "This is unusual weather, by Gar!"

Although their enemies for centuries had been powerless to prevail against them, the Cahuengas suddenly began to die off. The great decimation followed on the arrival of missionaries. These advance guards of civilization introduced the marriage ceremony and compelled the womenfolk to put on long underwear and calico wrappers. Sensible research workers do not believe that the advent of prayer, clothing and morals had anything to do with the extinction of this once brave race. It is true that diseases hitherto unknown to the Cahuengas, including tuberculosis, St. Vitus's Dance and certain social infections, laid them low; but it is known for a fact that their souls were saved.

Modern Hollywood began as a ranch, and, in a manner of speaking, continues to be one. Although there has been an appreciable change in the *fauna*, and the *flora* has been overwhelmed by pink minarets, open markets and shoppes, a lassitude prevails similar to that of the siesta hour on a hacienda.

The climate, it goes without saying, is ideal—consisting of all four seasons every day. A man may enjoy a sun-stroke at noon and revel in chilblains at midnight. The roses have little odor, a phenomenon explained in a legend which portrays *Oknub*, the Great Spirit, as having become miffed at a professor of botany who had turned up his nose when a Cahuenga squaw flirted with him.

“Just for that,” the legend quotes *Oknub* to have roared, “we will have no more odors until palefaces shall come with black boxes that have single eyes.”

The ranch, which (through no fault of its own) became the potter’s field of the arts, belonged to Mrs. H. H. Wilcox. She had been a Prohibition worker in Kansas. The products of her estate consisted of apricots and figs. Oranges, with or without navels, had not yet become part of the Hollywood landscape.

It is said that Mrs. Wilcox was traveling in the East in 1883 and had become acquainted with a lady who owned a farm in New England. This lady confided that she called her farm “Hollywood.” On her return to California, Mrs.

Wilcox appropriated that name for the ranch. Presently the whole area became known as Hollywood.

One of the Wilcox neighbors was Paul de Longpré, a French artist. He was noted for his oil-studies of local flowers. Tally-ho parties left Los Angeles for the De Longpré gardens, there to sip tea or lemonade and sing songs of Brittany. The tally-ho excursions took all day, and perhaps are responsible for Hollywood's reputation as a maelstrom of vicious conduct. Picnics, followed by a few shot-gun weddings, are apt to incite all manner of behind-the-fan whispers and slanderous calendar-thumbings.

Hollywood never had a government of its own. Its unofficial mayor during the early part of our century was B. C. Forbes, a realtor. Messrs. Edwards, De Longpré and other civic leaders informally administered the affairs of the hamlet. They discharged their functions so well that the neighbors were about to reward Mr. Edwards with election as their honest-to-goodness mayor, when Los Angeles upped and annexed the place.

The City of the Angels was beset at this time by growing pains and a passion for municipal long pants. It suffered an unbridled urge to outstrip San Francisco in size, come what may. Unreliable historians (jesting, no doubt) say that the Fathers were on the point of spread-eagling their city, not only to the Pacific Ocean but to the Atlantic as well, taking in New York and Baltimore by *vive voce* declaration. They actually *did* get as far as Iowa, when a

prophet, noted for conservative thought and divine backing, rose in council to say:

"We should let bad enough alone."

Hollywood was an obscure and dusty suburb when the film pioneers arrived, some in search of sunshine and others for respite from process servers. Patent controversies had caused a scarcity of cameras for producers who were not members of the new picture trust. A device called the Latham Loop, an integral element needed by all cameras to feed celluloid bands through the field of exposure, was controlled by the trust.

If an unauthorized company produced a camera, by force or by strategy, that party had to guard against discovery and reprisal. Each photographer had one or more bodyguards armed with baseball bats. These were commissioned to ward off spies who might try to peep inside bootlegged boxes or to thwart pirates bent on making off with the instruments. Fights and lawsuits were numerous. To escape them, or to get more sun, or both, the pioneers moved as pioneers always do, westward.

Southern California was not hospitable to the new industry of light and shadow. The first solid invasion had been that of Colonel William N. Selig of Chicago. He once had owned a wagon show, had discovered the Negro comic, Bert Williams, and afterward founded the greatest motion-picture zoo in the business. The nucleus of this zoo was

a group of used lions which Colonel Selig employed in a picture supposed to reveal President Theodore Roosevelt hunting in Africa. On his return from the Dark Continent, the President was very much upset by what he called a "fake." Colonel Selig, however, smoothed over this bit of chicanery and went on his way to more lions and several millions of dollars.

Colonel Selig's Los Angeles début was in 1908. His company arrived to shoot some water scenes for *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Soon thereafter, Colonel Selig filmed *In the Sultan's Power*, the first photoplay to have been made entirely in California.

The Selig studio was behind a Chinese laundry at Eighth and Hill streets. The director was Francis Boggs, one-time star of the stage epic, *Why Girls Leave Home*. Rob Wagner, editor of *Script*, and one of the wisest noodles in Hollywood, believes Boggs would have proved Griffith's only rival as a director had not a bullet put him down. Mr. Wagner was a near-witness to this, the motion-picture colony's first murder.

The day prior to the slaying, Frank, Colonel Selig's Japanese gardener, was working on a floral "S" planted inside a diamond-shaped frame of scarlet blossoms. This botanical whimsy was in honor of Colonel Selig's expected return from the East. On the near-by open-air stage, the company was making a Western thriller, with plenty of gun-fire.

The next day, Colonel Selig arrived to be welcomed with

toasts and the floral "S." It was a day of broken storms. As Rob Wagner got off the street car at the Selig Studio he heard a shot. At first he thought it was thunder, or some stage-play. Then he saw a lot of people running. Prominent among the runners was Mr. S——, the hero of many film hold-ups and rescue scenes. He was running the fastest of anyone, but in a direction *away from* the studio.

As Wagner approached, there was another shot. The bullet struck Colonel Selig in the arm. The first shot had killed Boggs. When asked concerning a motive, the gardener pointed toward the stage and said:

"Too damn much shooting all time. Boom! Boom! All day, boom! Boom! It make me crazy."

This homicide worked a hardship in another quarter and involved Mr. Hampton Del Ruth, afterward a shining light of the Sennett group. Del Ruth had written *Monte Cristo* for Selig and *Pelléas et Mélisande* for Universal, the first three-reel pictures made in America.

Boggs had produced a play of Del Ruth's, *Cherchez la Femme*, and had decided to make it as a picture. No scenarist of that time received more than \$25 a reel. Boggs had agreed to pay Del Ruth \$75 a reel! Furthermore, he would make it a four-reel picture. Mr. Boggs was walking toward his office to sign Del Ruth's check when the Jap gardener winged him.

Del Ruth held his head under a water tap to cool it. "Why couldn't that Jap have waited another five minutes?"

Although these were the silent days in the movies, Selig's



cowboys were hired on their ability to whoop as well as ride. The whooping put them in the proper mood. They also whooped while off the set and did some shooting at bar fixtures and in the palm-lined lanes. The citizens didn't like this racket and were sure the good Colonel Selig had cloven hooves and that his men wore tall sombreros to make room for horns. The townspeople referred to the studio as a "camp." The word "camp" afterward outraged producers as they rose to great wealth and began to long for social plums. Also, the Angelinos spoke of the picture people as the "movie colony," a reproachful term now regarded as less debasing.

So averse to motion-picture folk were the local taxpayers that they collected funds for propaganda against the picture makers and their hirelings. Several Hollywood kirks owe their cornerstones to this worthy campaign. Moreover, when the earlier apartment houses began to sprout in a community afterward noted for its architectural flatulence, the owners riveted signs to their doors, one of which read:

"No dogs or actors allowed."

But the King Canutes of Southern California were caught in the undertow. The pioneers were pouring in. The second company to reach the West Coast was Bison. Director Charles K. French ground out one hundred and eighty-five pictures between November, 1909, and July, 1910, an average of one photoplay for every day and a half. This was a

record, comparable perhaps to the mark set by G. M. ("Broncho Billy") Anderson. Anderson, the first actor to have his name on a screen, also was author and producer of his plays. He made three hundred and seventy-six pictures in a like number of consecutive weeks.

The third motion-picture troupe to invade Los Angeles was D. W. Griffith's Biograph unit. That was in January of 1910. Thenceforward the deluge was in full flux from East to West, a new form of gold-rush.

The first picture actually composed and made in Hollywood proper was in 1911, when Al Christie filmed *The Law of the Range*. Certain disrespectful wags have observed that Artist De Longpré died that same year.

Christie was a director for David Horsley's Nestor Company, the first studio opened in Hollywood. It was behind a tavern at the corner of Sunset and Gower. Christie subsequently became a producer of comedies and the nearest competitor Mack Sennett ever had in that field. He erected his own studio, and, after the grand opening, went on a tour of inspection. He arrived at the workroom of his scenario editor.

"What you doing?" asked Christie.

"Working on a scenario," said the hack.

Mr. Christie beamed at this evidence of industry. "Do you think it will make a good picture?"

The writer replied sagely: "It always *has*."

D. W. Griffith for a long time had wanted to take his company to California. His business superiors, however, regarded Fort Lee, New Jersey, as the more economical place for location shots.

They had allowed him two trips to Cuddebackville, in the Orange Mountains of New York, and these had been exciting forays. There Griffith had made *The Mended Lute* and other outdoor dramas. It was there, too, that Griffith found it difficult to get sleep, what with Arthur Johnson and Mack Sennett singing loudly and long and presiding at séances, with ouija-board conferences and table-tipping debauches. Also at Cuddebackville, Sennett and Johnson had alarmed the countryside by hiding in a graveyard adjoining the inn to howl at a pair of earnest village lovers.

It was not until Griffith had tapped the works of Poet Robert Browning that his superiors consented to the California trip. Griffith made *Pippa Passes*, and, among other revolutionary departures, introduced a then-sensational lighting effect, which showed the dawn floating through *Pippa's* window.

Griffith's *Pippa* commanded the attention of the press. It was the first time that the fourth estate had recognized the motion picture as a serious medium of expression. The *New York Times* wrote liberally concerning it in its issue of October 10, 1909.

Griffith thereupon asked for California—and got it.

The Griffith troupe arrived in the land of poinsettias early in January. The more affluent members stayed at the new Alexandria Hotel, which was to become a rendezvous for movie folk. The Griffith actors were allowed two dollars a day for expenses. Sennett wanted to reside at the Alexandria, even though he had to pawn his diamond ring to do so. The Sennett diamond had been to "uncle's" several times, and whenever Mamma Sennett saw her boy on the screen *without* the stone, she deduced rightly that Mack was hard up again.

His passion for the Alexandria was not based upon a desire to cut a social swath. Nor was it founded on a wish to be near the director or his higher-salaried colleagues. What fascinated Sennett more than all else were the Alexandria *bathrooms*.

Sennett was a confirmed bather. Sometimes he had as many as four tubs a day. He said he could think better while lying in the bath, soaping, soaking and splashing. When told that the ancient Romans were bath-crazy, he said:

"That explains their success."

"Maybe," said Pathé Lehrman, "it explains their fall."

"I hadn't heard of that side," said Sennett. "I was under the impression they ran the whole world."

Sennett insisted that his potential prime minister, Pathé Lehrman, also reside at the Alexandria. They barely had taken up quarters there when Sennett made for the bathroom, to relax for a full hour.

"When we get set with our own company," Sennett said, "I'll install a bathtub five or six times as big as this."

"Install it where?"

Mr. Sennett spoke in a matter-of-fact tone. "In my office. Near my desk. I'll have a rubbing board, too."

Pathé thought this a bit eccentric. "It sounds like a gymnasium."

"A lot of nervous breakdowns," Mr. Sennett said, "come from not bathing enough or getting massaged."

"That reminds me," said Pathé, "Powell is looking better'n ever, strain or no strain. Maybe he won't crack up after all."

"Don't let it fool you," said Sennett. "Powell can't worry and fret like he does all the time. We gotta keep on our toes for the big chance."

"By the way," said Pathé, "Mary Pickford has been boosted to \$75 a week."

Mr. Sennett was rinsing his toes under the faucet. "You're talking through your hat. Nobody gets that kind of money."

"I heard it right from the front," said Pathé. "D. W. himself don't deny it."

Mr. Sennett rose like Venus, dripping. "Hand me that towel, Pathé." He began to blot himself thoughtfully. "Pathé," he said, "you sure they're paying that kind of dough to an actor?"

"Seventy-five dollars. A small fortune."

Sennett narrowly missed stepping on the soap. "This business has gone completely nuts!"

Director Powell became increasingly groggy with overwork and worry. Sennett bombarded Griffith for a chance to direct a picture. He was dreaming of a time when he, too, might receive \$75 a week. He then no longer would have to pawn his diamond periodically.

It looked as though Griffith would grant Sennett's request, inasmuch as Mack had dropped alluring remarks concerning a story idea, but fate stepped in. Pathé Lehrman took ill and went to the hospital.

Mack visited his protégé and was impressed by two things: the comeliness of Pathé's nurse and the yellow hue of Pathé's face.

"What's the matter with your pan?" asked Mack.

"Yellow jaundice," said Pathé. "But I'm getting a good rest."

Mack reprimanded him. "How can you lay there and *rest* when we got so much work to do? Our chance is right on top of us, and you go get sick."

"I can't help being sick, can I?"

"I've never been sick, so I don't know. But just forget about rest and think about our story. Maybe I can hold Griffith for a while."

"Is Powell getting dizzy?"

"Kind of. Anyway, I wish you'd hurry and get well."

Lehrman's pretty nurse came in and went out again. Sennett gazed after her wistfully. "Another thing, Pathé, don't let any foolish romances come between you and our work. It's sacred. . . . What's her name?"

"Myrtle," said Pathé. "A nice package, eh?"

Mack studied Pathé's saffron face. "I guess you're safe from romances as long as you look like that. Don't die; there's so damn much to do."

On his way out, Mr. Sennett conferred with the nurse. He asked if Mr. Lehrman was malingering, and would she like to dine with him. She said she would.

The next day Mack found Pathé in a saffron sulk. "You had a relapse?" he asked.

"I oughtn't to speak to you at all," said Pathé.

Mack was alarmed. "You got a fever or something?"

Pathé sat up in bed. He was a self-portrait in yellow. "You and your work! Took the nurse out to dinner, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Mack, "as I recall it, I did."

"As you *'recall'* it! God, what a double-crosser!"

"If you wasn't sick in bed, Pathé, I'd get sore."

Pathé was in a dither. "You ruined her! You ruined her, and you'll end up by ruining us!"

This was a very serious charge, as Sennett construed it. "Don't be a chump. My mind was on my work all the time. I didn't even hold her hand."

"She told me," said Pathé bitterly. "Everything. Me laying here like a forsaken gallstone, and you . . ."

"She couldn't have told you anything," said Mack. "There was nothing to tell."

"Shut up!" yelled Pathé. "Here I've been kinda stuck on this nurse. I bought beer for her every noon. Two bottles. And what do you go and do?"

"Not a damn thing," said Sennett.

"Behind my back, too. You take her out and buy *champagne*. She's as cold as a herring to me today."

"It was just a split of domestic California champagne," said Mack.

"You *admit* it, then!" said Pathé. "You admit it *was* champagne!"

The nurse came in, beamed on Mr. Sennett, and said: "Oh, I'm so glad to see you again, Mr. Sennett." To Pathé, she said sternly: "The doctor says you got to sleep."

As they passed through the door, the nurse held Mr. Sennett's arm, and snuggled up to him, saying: "Were you serious when you said I was just the type for the movies?"

Mr. Lehrman groaned. His yellow jowls had turned an arsenious green.



## *Chapter 9*

### LOVE AMONG THE GERANIUMS

**S**ENNETT explored the Glendale geranium fields and asked questions of the natives during his first California visit. How much was land worth? By the lot? By the acre? He inquired concerning rents and leases. One might have thought him a budding realtor, so charmingly sly were his questions.

Although he did not have a dime beyond his Biograph salary, Mack already was window-shopping for a studio site. He would have money some day. He would be a director, and after that a producer—with a huge bathtub in his office to symbolize success.

He was a long-distance planner. To several colleagues he appeared mentally slow-moving and morosely ponderous. His

boiler-maker mannerisms fooled these self-satisfied folk. They put him down as a sulker and went about their own whirligig business. Mack plodded on and was not discouraged. He had youth and health; hardships seldom upset that combination.

He let the others make their snap-judgments and run about in circles. He bided his time. It was his nature to view problems from many angles, send up trial balloons, enter debates with himself and reduce complex situations to elementary terms. That process exhausted, he consulted the supreme court of his instincts—a course he might well have taken in the first place. Sometimes it required days to make up his mind—occasionally years. Once convinced, however, he moved with the direct, unswerving force of an army tank. He never rested or let his aides relax until a job was done. He had great singleness of purpose. He made few mistakes in his business heyday and never the same one twice.

He began to strut like a cock when first he saw his name on a screen and in letters five feet high. He behaved like an Abyssinian monarch, a Lion of Judah, among his retainers, but was the first to say that he knew little of dictionaries and text books. He admitted freely his cultural limitations. He was something of a contradiction, what with his regal didoes on the one hand and his frank and spontaneous plea of academic ignorance on the other. And through intellectual honesty, rather than intellectual training, he escaped being a boor and an upstart.

He was not sulking—as so many thought when he retired within his huge shell and kept silent. He was trying to think.

After being victimized several times, he learned to smell a fake a mile away. He particularly mistrusted those prancing literati who prated of art while flowing ties tickled their whiskers, and egg-stained waistcoats flapped in the breeze. He took it for granted that those who sought employment in the movies did so primarily to make money. He could not believe that anyone would enter an industry purely to lead lost causes or die at last ditches.

The written word awed but did not frighten him. He thought in terms of photographic action. He refused steadfastly to use manuscripts for any of his productions. In his opinion, any tale unable to survive the tricks of an author's memory was not fit to be photographed. He held that pictorial action, like music, is of itself a universal language, one designed to address the eye, just as music addresses the ear. If either medium got past eye or ear, and into the soul, no harm was done.

He learned the advantage of saying "No." A negative can be salvaged more easily than an affirmative in so many of life's affairs. He also knew how to look before he leaped. When his lieutenants proposed an idea, he seldom said: "That's it," or, "That ain't it," but: "I'll let you know later."

Once, it is said, a friend asked him: "Think it'll rain before night?"

Three hours later a drizzle set in, and Mack replied: "I wouldn't be surprised."

As he stood among the vacant lots of Glendale, the seeds of conquest were sprouting within his tenacious will. In fancy he saw himself surrounded by harem-like walls, with many cameras whizzing on several stages. He imagined himself seated in a projection room to view the mirth-provoking products of his empire. A King of Comedy! When *he* laughed, a million subjects would laugh.

As he ambled about the Glendale terrain, he suddenly felt upset. It dawned upon him quite unexpectedly that he had tremors of the stomach. It couldn't be hunger; he had put away a big steak with onions but an hour ago at the Alexandria. What an eerie flutter! Could it be love?

He had experienced, in his time, several romantic moments, but they had glided away like swan boats on a park lagoon. He remembered his careful analyses of the love affairs of others; the trials of the late Amos Cabot; the tribulations of Miss Lucile Howey and her razor-minded agent, Mr. Volpi; Pathé Lehrman and the leap for life across the apartment court—and lately the champagne joust with Pathé's buxom nurse. But all these adventures provided scanty clues as to how a man should know definitely when true love knocked at the heart's door.

Perhaps, also, he recalled with a feeling of confusion an alleged incident of his burlesque days, when he was the hind

legs of a horse. It is said that he had been seized by an intense fit of puppy love when he saw the leading lady in tights. A report—which he will not confirm—had it that he proposed to this lady one evening. In his dreamy state, he forgot that he was still clad in the horse's leggings.

The prima donna was represented as having laughed out loud. "My Gawd, kid! I'd as lief marry a mounted cop's grandson."

A day was to come when he would cause her to remember that remark. Slow to make up his mind, he was correspondingly slow to forget.

As he turned homeward to the Alexandria, Sennett tried to shake his emotional symptoms. He began to count his blessings. He remarked to himself that he was healthy, well clothed, active and ambitious. Then why that strange flurry within his chest? It *must* be love.

It was characteristic that this sentimental dawn should wait until he was absent nearly three months, and separated by three thousand miles from his inspirational source. He decided to examine his sad condition minutely. He wanted to be sure.

Arrived at the Alexandria, he prepared to write a letter to the girl. Her name was Mabel Normand. He had met her at the Biograph studios in New York. As he scribbled bravely, he thought of the difference in their ages. He was nearing thirty. She was barely sixteen. He tore up the letter.

He began another letter. He thought of arguments in

favor of his suit. Mabel was an Irish Catholic. So was he. He got as far as page two of this letter, when he remembered that his career came first. Then he tore up the second letter.

For hours he sat there, pondering, writing, tearing up letters, only to start fresh ones. Finally he scanned the fifteenth effort carefully and wished, for once, that he wore a flowing tie and—if need be—had egg-stains on a vest that flapped in the breeze.

Mabel Normand was born in Boston, November 10, 1894. She attended St. Mary's Convent at Northwest Point, Massachusetts. At the age of fourteen she moved with her parents to Staten Island, New York. She was five feet four inches tall, weighed one hundred and twenty pounds, could swim, dive, ride, shoot, and played only with boys. Girls were too frail; they bored her. She had dark hair and laughing brown eyes. She was an arrant tomboy and a jokester unable to excuse dignity, even that of an archbishop's horse.

Mabel's heart was big and her spirit truly brave. She was in love with life, nor did she complain in the bitter after years when life, like many other sweethearts, proved unfaithful.

At fifteen Mabel was artist's model for Charles Dana Gibson, James Montgomery Flagg, Penhryn Stanlaws and other magazine illustrators. She was a friend of Alice Joyce

and Olive Thomas, models who were to become motion-picture stars.

She had been posing at fashion shows when a photographer recommended her to J. Stuart Blackton of Vitagraph as "the prettiest girl in New York." She went to the Flatbush studio and began her career in pictures.

Mabel worked for Vitagraph during one winter. She made a short, *Over the Garden Wall*, with Maurice Costello, but the church-spires of Brooklyn became a background too gloomy for this lively girl. She tripped across the bridge to work for D. W. Griffith at a salary of \$25 a week.

Certain commentators believe that, had Mabel remained permanently under the Griffith aegis and gone in for the more solemn portrayals of emotion, she would have become the foremost of all women film stars. Others, who think she *was* the foremost of women film stars, do not believe that Griffith would have helped her at all.

Great as he was, Griffith insisted on doing the thinking for his people. He was a master mind, of the John McGraw order—that baseball Napoleon who used to signal from the dugout how, when and where each ball was to be pitched. And, while Griffith's thinking no doubt was the best, and possibly the last, thinking known to the motion-picture industry, the actors were multiple reflections of Director Griffith.

Mabel Normand was no reflector. She was an innate mimic, but could not imitate mental processes. Possibly she

was an authentic genius. Perhaps Isadora Duncan was the only other woman of our time to possess beauty, charm, ability, soul and courage the equal of Mabel's. And, like the gallant Isadora, Mabel walked with tragedy.

Mabel had yet another outstanding quality—a Rabelaisian laughter and bludgeoning wit. This quality did not soften the attacks when scandal linked her to events not of her making. If there is one thing that the self-anointed nincompoops of censorship cannot bear, it is laughter. Mirth is not in their prune-whip brains. Gaiety is not in their flaccid loins. Humor does not flow in their macaroni arteries. They do not understand the spring freshets of laughter, and therefore fear it as a deluge. Just why the miracle of forthright laughter should affront the bilious devotees of scrub-saints forever mystified Mabel Normand.

Sennett sealed the envelope and put a stamp on his letter to Mabel. "Yes," he thought, "she will grow up to be a fine woman."

The next California invasion by the Griffith company was on an ambitious scale. Biograph sent a second troupe along, with Director Powell in charge of the junior invaders. Better stages, better dressing rooms and more money for everyone were elements that made this stay a happy one.

Sennett had the pleasure of playing several times opposite Mabel. Sometimes he was a Mexican Romeo with a guitar.



Again he was a rube with a carpetbag—or was a policeman!

"Great Scott!" he said to Mabel. "Policemen are the most interesting thing on the screen. When I get going, I'll have more policemen than they got in Scotland Yard."

Sennett was not a "gabby" fellow when in the company of women. But, curiously enough, he found himself garrulous and expansive with Mabel. She knew how to handle him. She *fought* with him. He seemed to like resistance. It focused his mind.

It now was generally accepted that Sennett was in love. Whether Mabel loved him, none could say at this time. Certain members of the troupe thought she liked Pathé Lehrman better, but Sennett did not appear to take notice.

He was solicitous of Mabel's welfare. Her impulsiveness worried him sometimes, and he undertook to lecture her on morals and manners. She would respond with embarrassing shouts of: "Aunt Prue!"

Mrs. Charlotte Pickford had taken an interest in Mabel and looked out for her during the Biograph initiation. Mabel had a deep love for this brave and gracious mother of Mary Pickford. Sennett, also, was an admirer of Mrs. Pickford, a woman so unlike the majority of "stage-mothers," who sell their daughters down the celluloid river and yell for the police if the drawn-and-quartered lassies keep any time or money for themselves.

Mabel was not a pampered star. Few were in those pioneer days. Even at her zenith, Mabel Normand would not have a "double" for her hazardous rides, leaps or falls. One day she had to jump twenty-two times from a boat-deck into a surging sea before the scene was photographed properly. She went home to lie awake all night, her head aching, her ears bleeding. When a doctor advised her not to take chances with her health and safety, she said:

"What in hell's the difference, if it makes a lot of people laugh?"

She was on location the next day, to be dragged by a horse through the mud of a newly drained lake. After she had washed up and put on clean clothes, she was interviewed by a lady, who said:

"I suppose the hardships of motion-picture actresses are overestimated?"

Mabel was too tired to explain. "Yes," she said. "It's an exceedingly monotonous life."

On this second trip to California, Mack heard that two "big executives" were in town. They were Adam Kessel and Charles O. Bauman, former bookmakers at Sheepshead Bay race-course. Their rise as picture moguls had been amazing.

Before his advent to the films, Kessel had been a fairly successful collector of horse-players' money. His sheet-writer, Bauman, had been no slouch at handling odds. One day Governor Charles Evans Hughes twiddled his famous

whiskers and signed a bill to make it unlawful to bet on ponies in New York State.

Unhappily, Messrs. Kessel and Bauman had just completed a disastrous week with the public. They felt it would do no harm if they continued in business, regardless of Governor Hughes, with a little surreptitious bookmaking. The heavy hand of John Law descended on the Kessel shoulder. He decided to retire from turf and field, but with very little ready cash.

While moaning about fate, Kessel suddenly remembered a man named Charlie Streimer, to whom he had lent \$2,500. He called to find Mr. Streimer among a lot of flat, round cans.

"What's these?" asked Mr. Kessel.

"They're films," said Charlie.

"What's that? Herring?"

"Kind of," said Charlie, "only they're celluloid. Motion pictures."

"Meaning what?"

"Movies. Actors that make faces on theater screens. I'm in the exchange business. It's what they call the 'middleman.'"

"You make real money out of them cans?"

Charlie picked up a can and posed like a discus thrower. "I'm doing O.K. Tell you what—I'll pay what I owe you or cut you in as an exchange man yourself."

All respectable race-track people have hunches. Kessel had one now. "I think I'll take a flier," he said.

He took a flier, and with Bauman as partner became so successful that competitors tried to crowd him out of the motion-picture paddock. But Kessel was a hard man to crowd. When members of the regular group refused to let him have licensed film, Kessel said:

"We'll produce our own then."

He got a camera (one of the "bootleg" variety) and began to take his own pictures on sidewalks and up alleys. When his concern grew big enough to need a name, Kessel christened it in honor of the majestic buffalo on the United States nickel.

"That's our trade-mark," he told Bauman. "Bison. We'll call our company 'Bison.'"

To make an impression on Kessel and Bauman, Sennett rented a tuxedo and took to lounging in the lobby of the Alexandria. Although he liked chewing-tobacco better than any other form of the weed, he began to invest in pompous cigars.

"Be careful not to pull any cute tricks while I'm in the lobby," he warned Mabel. "I'm angling for some big backing."

He was unable, however, to fascinate Kessel and Bauman. They said vaguely that they would meet him "some time" in New York. They were true picture executives—not interested in unproven talent.

Mack was rather disconsolate, but brightened one day

when Pathé Lehrman burst into the Sennett room with news.

"Powell has cracked—finally!" said Pathé. "Caved in."

Mack received this announcement with superior calm. "It happened like I forecasted," he said.

Director Powell turned over his megaphone with the sad majesty of a defeated general surrendering his sword. Sennett became a director, with the stipulation that he must serve as an actor as well.

He was ready to saddle and ride his skyrocket now.

Sennett returned to New York with Lehrman and made a picture called *Comrades*, the story of two tramps. Jack Dillon was one of the tramps—Sennett the other. The release demonstrated that the new director's work had an authoritative, rugged, moving quality; that Sennett had a keen sense of timing and of pace, and the ability to concoct sure-fire entertainment.

Sennett received the usual congratulations from his employers. When he asked for a raise, he received the usual wet blankets. However, he managed to levy upon his bosses for fifty dollars a week.

"And now," he said to Pathé, "we've got to hit these pictures right on the nose every time. It's hard to make a success. It's twice as hard to stay successful."

Mack's mother had deserted Connecticut and gone home to Canada. Sennett now could afford to bring her on a visit

to New York. She arrived to find him in love, and thoroughly approved of Mabel. They had a great time together. The three went to Coney Island, where Mack announced that he would like to make a picture of that resort.

"I'm going into business for myself soon, Mamma," he said. "Because I'm getting trimmed where I am."

"It isn't everyone that makes fifty dollars a week," said Mamma.

"It'll be chicken feed before long, Mamma. Just wait."

Mack said he was going to find out actually how much money his pictures were earning for Biograph. "They keep stalling me," he said. "It's hard to get the dope, because our pictures all sell in a bunch and at ten cents a foot. But I'm going to find out even if I have to break into the bookkeeping department some night."

"Don't let them cheat you, Mike," said Mamma, "but don't let them shoot you for a burglar, either."

Several days elapsed, and it came time to put Mamma on a train. "Did you get a look at the books?" she asked.

"I did, Mamma," said Sennett. "At first it was a puzzle, but I happened on something that showed just where I stand. It was in the accounts with English firms. They don't buy their pictures by the foot. They buy only the ones that are in demand and they pay for them by the picture."

"I'm sorry you looked, then," said Mamma. "The English never liked the Irish, and they're just prejudiced against you."

"No, Mamma," said Sennett. "You don't understand."

"I've understood the English since I was a little girl, Mike. They're just prejudiced."

Sennett put her aboard the train. "Mamma, the books showed that my pictures in England are next to Griffith's in popularity and next to his in price."

She waved good-bye. "Don't be fooled, Mike. And don't believe a word you read in them English books. Good-bye, my son."

After his mother had gone, he went to dinner with Mabel. He told her of his raid upon the books and his pleasurable discovery. "I'm even better than I thought," he said.

"Yes," said Mabel. "You're even better than I thought."

Kessel and Bauman were impressed by the Sennett pictures, particularly *Comrades*. They now were making sorties on other companies, to seize stars and directors. Thomas H. Ince was one of the new directors in Bison's fold. They made an appointment with Sennett at Luchow's Restaurant, and entered an agreement to finance him.

Kessel and Bauman were to put up fifteen hundred dollars as a trial budget for three pictures of one reel each. If Sennett made good, Kessel and Bauman would exercise an option on his services. He then would have a share in the profits and a salary of one hundred dollars a week.

"Gentlemen," said Sennett, "you are rich men. Well, you'll both be a lot richer this time next year. And so will I."

Mr. Kessel was about to leave for Philadelphia on business. As he talked to Sennett, he consulted a Pennsylvania Railroad time-table. Sennett glanced at the time-table and had an inspiration.

"I've got a trade-mark for our company," he said.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Kessel and Mr. Bauman simultaneously.

Mack pointed at the trade-mark of the Pennsylvania Railroad. "Look at that keystone. If it's good enough for a big company like *that*, it ought to be good enough for us. Keystone!"

This was the start of the famous Keystone Comedy Company, noted for its policemen, custard pies (although they generally were blackberry, for photographic reasons) and bathing beauties.



## Chapter 10

### THE RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

SENNETT took Mabel Normand and Pathé Lehrman to Keystone and began to enlist other talent. Ford Sterling and Fred Mace, comedians of the violently muscular school, were among the recruits.

Sterling looked like a congenital chief of police—a recommendation beyond cavil. Reared on Wisconsin kraut and wieners, Sterling had joined Robinson's circus at the age of twelve as "Keno, the Boy Clown." Afterward he had toured the hay, grain and oat capitals with a theatrical troupe, whose artistic assets were *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Julius Cæsar*.

By the time Sennett had obtained a camera and laid out moneys for cast and other elements of production, he found his budget alarmingly low. As a measure of economy, he

used his apartment as a rehearsal hall. It was also his office.

He found another means of retrenchment when a gaunt and sallow gentleman with eyes like chips of coal called upon him. This personage introduced himself as Sergei Androv, a camera man late of Russia. He impressed Sennett by his Continental manners, a nimble monocle and a brave offer to work "on spec." That is, if he made good in photographing the first three pictures of the Sennett program, Sergei was to get seventy-five dollars.

"If I fail . . ." Sergei started to say.

Mack raised a right hand toward his apartment ceiling, as though making a vow to heaven. "Nobody's going to fail. It ain't in the cards."

After the first day of rehearsal—a session marred by complaints of neighbors, who thought Sennett had delirium tremens and was being subdued by male nurses—it occurred to Mack to ask Sergei a question or two.

"By the way," Mack said, "you *sure* you know how to handle a movie camera?"

Sergei gave one of those smiles of ennui designed to put Americans in their place. "I happen to have been official photographer at the court of His Imperial Majesty, Tsar Nicholas." Sergei stiffened, clicked his heels, saluted and looked patriotically unhappy. "May God save the Little Father."

"Well," said Sennett, "I guess His Honor, Nicholas, wouldn't hire no bums. But I want God to save *us*, too. Was

the pictures you took of him in motion, or was they stills?"

Sergei became as stiff as a frozen eel and again clicked his boots. "Perhaps Monsieur thinks I am an impostor!"

The prospect of losing a distinguished but cheap expert frightened Mack. "No offense, brother. But I can't afford to take chances."

A frost-bitten smile, suggestive of wolf-fights on the steppes, made Sergei look very menacing. "His Imperial Majesty . . ." He saluted again. "The Tsar of all the Russias was not afraid to take chances. In Russia we know no fear."

"It ain't a question of bravery," Sennett said. "It's a matter of coffee and doughnuts. Anyway, the Tsar didn't have his whole damn future wrapped up in tin cans. I hope you ain't offended."

Sergei flipped his monocle. "I am a lancer and a gentleman."

"Lancer!" said Sennett. "Well, why didn't you tell me *that* in the first place? Here's the camera and some cans of film. Be at the Fort Lee ferry at eight o'clock in the morning."

Sennett worked like a horse at an oat-bag. Between rehearsals and trips to Fort Lee, the Keystone head visited the film laboratory to arrange for development of his pictures. The laboratory people said they had so much work on hand

for the big companies that they couldn't promise delivery on a set schedule.

"You'll have to wait your turn," said the laboratory manager.

"I'm in a terrible rush," Sennett explained.

"You'll have to wait. Our regular customers have preference—Biograph, Vitagraph and Kalem. Can't help it."

Mack went ahead with his shooting at Fort Lee. He had no regulation sets, but put his troupe into action whenever he came upon a field or vacant lot. Once the entire company was run off a farm by the proprietor and his dogs. During the retreat, Mack begged Sergei to "keep cranking" so as to get "animal atmosphere" into the picture.

"This I cannot do," Sergei explained, while running.

Sennett implored the lancer. "I'll go back and chuck bricks if you'll get set up and crank the dogs chasing us."

"You do not understand," said Sergei. "They are Japanese dogs, and my people do not like Japan."

Several times during the Fort Lee excursions, Sennett was worried about Sergei's technique. The Russian never suggested re-takes or admitted that anything was out of range. Once Mack was sure that he and Sterling had rolled completely out of focus and to the side of the camera.

"Hadn't we better shoot it over?" asked Mack.

"Monsieur Sennett," said Sergei rather sadly, "the Tsar . . ." and he saluted, "the Tsar honored me by calling me

'thou' and having his samovar in my company. Yet never once in all the time I took pictures at the Winter Palace did he make suggestions while I worked."

Sennett thought about this phase of royal reticence. "That's O.K., too, but while you was cranking, was His Honor getting socked with a broom-handle and turning handsprings?"

"He is a most dignified sovereign," said Sergei, who added, for some reason known only to himself: "And he is terribly in love with the Tsarina."

"I'll admit that," said Sennett, "but what do you say we put down some markers to separate the foreground from the background? Then we'll all know where we are at."

"Monsieur," said Sergei, "I am a Russian artist. In our land, we do not measure with artificial aids. We strive for mood. Measurements would be disastrous and kill our mood."

Mack sighed and continued his direction. At the close of the day he took his second can of film to the laboratory.

"Did you print up the first reel?" he asked.

The manager shook his head. "No. A lot of Biograph work come in and we're up to our necks. You'll just have to wait."

While Mack was making the third reel in the wilds of Fort Lee, he thought Sergei was cranking the camera at the wrong tempo. He went over to the lancer and asked: "Ser-

gei, I don't want to butt in, but ain't you turning that crank kinda slow?"

Sergei was in a condescending humor today—perhaps because Mack had advanced him ten dollars. "You Americans are so impatient," said the lancer. "Everywhere I go, I see and hear nothing but 'Speed! Speed! Speed!' In Europe we take things more moderately and live longer."

"To hell with that! Here we're on our third picture and I don't know a thing about the two we've made. They're still in the cans. All I know is, if anything goes wrong, I'm in the can, too."

Sergei breathed on his monocle and polished it with his necktie. "I shall have so many droll tales to tell my fellow officers when I return to my regiment."

Mack had a clairvoyant feeling of defeat. "Sergei," he said, "if these pictures flop, I don't think you'll ever return to Russia."

Sennett and his troupe finished the third picture. Mack took the can of film to the laboratory. The manager was more impolite than ever.

"Now look here, Sennett," he said, "who in hell are *you* alongside Biograph and Kalem? You come in here and throw your piddling films at us like you was God hisself. Lemme tell you something, we'll develop your films and print 'em as soon as we get a chance and not before. See?"

Sennett held his temper. He had too much at stake to risk losing more time than was necessary. He left the laboratory

and went to call on his old friend and former chief, D. W. Griffith.

Griffith agreed to put in a hastening word at the laboratory. He also consented to let Mack use the Biograph projection room when his films were ready.

"That's mighty big of you," Mack said. "I won't forget it."

"Glad to do it, Mack," said Griffith. "And I'd like to see your pictures when you get ready to run them."

Mack was elated. "You don't mean that! Tell you what. We'll have a private showing, and I want you to bring your people in to see them. I've got some new effects that'll knock you cold."

Sennett's pockets were empty, but he planned a big dinner at Mouquin's famous restaurant for the night of the preview. He had to pawn his diamond ring again, but it was in a good cause.

Camera-man Sergei heard of the big dinner and asked if he might bring a few relatives and close friends. Sennett inquired how many there were.

Sergei did some casting up and said: "I'd like to bring my two aunts and uncles, too, but I do not wish to presume."

"Well, I asked you, how many *are* there?"

"Also," said Sergei, "my nephews would enjoy it so much. They are strangers in a strange land."

"For God's sake, how many?"

"Little Dmitri is ill with tonsils; so, without Dmitri, it would be an even twenty-two."

"Good God!" said Sennett. "So *that's* the 'regiment' you was talking about! No. Just come alone."

"As you say," said Sergei. "We Russians have deep understanding."

The laboratory management at last reported Mack's films ready for delivery. He was overjoyed. However, when he called, the manager refused to hand over the three tin cans until paid in cash.

"This is not a charity bazaar," he said. "Pay up, or we'll call it no dice. See?"

Sennett had not laid aside any money for film-development. He had to seek out his backers, Kessel and Bauman, for the extra sum. He explained his call by saying he wanted his sponsors to attend the pre-view at the Biograph projection room, and that they were to be guests of honor at the Mouquin dinner. On rising to go, he broached the matter of the laboratory fee and said:

"It slipped my mind, and my bank is closed this late in the afternoon."

He made the "touch" and hastened again to the laboratory. He took his films home and hid them beneath his mattress. He sat up all night to watch out for possible fire or theft.



The next day he made great preparations for the banquet and supervised the decoration of one of Mouquin's dining-rooms. He kept the films in a valise and close beside him all the time.

Toward evening he and his troupe gathered at the Biograph projection room. His old colleagues congratulated him in advance on his splendid work. Newcomers looked at him enviously and addressed him as "Mr." Sennett. He tried to bear these honors lightly, as becomes a successful man of the world.

Griffith was looking at some rushes, scenes taken the day before, and this held up the Sennett showing for half an hour. Finally Griffith was done with his inspection and the pre-view audience seated themselves on the kitchen chairs of the stuffy room.

Messrs. Kessel and Bauman occupied seats in the front row and beside Griffith and Sennett. Also present were the Pickfords, Mary, her mother, Sister Lottie and Brother Jack. The Gish girls, Lillian and Dorothy, Blanche Sweet and others were there.

Sennett invited Camera-man Sergei to sit behind him, but the lancer said: "No, I am easily oppressed by a dark room. So I sit near the door at the back."

Mack was swelled up and very happy. It was *der Tag*. He thought the operator was taking a long time to thread the projection machine, but remembered that he now was an honored guest and should not voice a criticism. At last there

came a whirring like the winging of bats in a cow-barn. Then a shaft of light. Then flash! flicker! flash!

No one spoke for a moment. Sennett was on his feet, and, ladies or not, began to call upon the Deity. "Operator!" he thundered in his finest and loudest bass. "What in God's name is wrong with you?"

The operator replied: "Nothin's wrong wid me, feller. It's your damn no-good film that's on the blink."

"You're not running it at normal speed," said Sennett. "Maybe I should come up there and show you how to do it."

This sarcasm brought the reply: "No. It's me that ought to show *you* how to make pictures."

Mr. Griffith intervened. "Charles!" he said. "Charles!"

These two barrels from the Master settled Charles.

"Now try it again at normal speed," said Sennett, "and we can see something besides skyrockets."

The operator did as he was told. It was worse than ever. Nothing but huge fire-flies, pole-vaulting. Not a trace of human activity on the screen, only a leaping blur.

Mr. Kessel stirred painfully. "What's the matter, Mack?"

Sennett knew what was wrong now. Sergei! The slow turning of the camera-crank at Fort Lee had caused the trouble! Pictures taken at sub-normal speed project at abnormal speed.

"Take 'em off and don't show the others!" Sennett yelled to Charlie.

He then looked about for Sergei. He intended to throttle the lancer. But Sergei had gone.

It was a very mournful dinner party at Mouquin's. And, at the close, Mr. Sennett made a short speech.

"Gentlemen, I had a tough break with these films, and to tell the truth, it's because I was a sap. Like a lot of other people do, I fell for a monocle and a gift of gab. I'm not going to quit making pictures, because I wouldn't know how to quit. The only thing I *am* quitting is Russian camera men. From now on Americans will turn my cameras, and if possible, they'll be Irishmen."

Kessel and Bauman sipped Mack's champagne and decided to back him further. At least he was honest with himself. They told him not to worry about money; they had plenty of it.

Mack redeemed his diamond and made nine shorts, the first of which was called *Cohen at Coney Island*. Its release, September 13, 1912, justified the faith of Kessel and Bauman in Sennett's ability. They agreed to let him go to California and open a studio there. In Sennett's California party were Pathé Lehrman, Mabel Normand, Ford Sterling and Fred Mace.

Sennett decided to have a Turkish bath the night before his departure. He went to Fleishman's, took half an hour of dry heat, then a salt rub, half an hour of steam, and then retired to a private room for a special oil-massage.

The masseur entered. It was none other than Sergei Androv. Mack and Sergei recognized each other simultaneously. Sergei seemed paralyzed, unable to run. Sennett rose from the rubbing board to say:

"You're not going to rub *me*, my friend."

"Are you going to call the police?"

"No," said Mack. "Not if you tell me honestly just *why* you cranked that camera so slow."

"Monsieur Sennett, I felt so horrible I would have killed myself honorably, but I could not afford the pistol. I cried and cried all night."

"*You* cried!" yelled Mack. "Damn it! I *died*. Now, if you don't want to get pinched, tell me why you cranked so slow?"

"My intentions were honest. I heard you did not have much money, that you were trying to economize. *So I turned the crank slow to save film.*"

Mack sank back on the rubbing board.

## Chapter II

### TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP

**K**ESSEL and Bauman had sent Thomas H. Ince to the Los Angeles suburbs several months before Mack Sennett arrived to put the Keystone in the arch of comedy.

Ince, former stock actor, was the son of John E. and Irma Ince, popular stage players of the late nineteenth century. Mr. Ince forsook the proscenium to portray villains in Uncle Carl Laemmle's Imp pictures. From there he moved to Biograph and emerged a comic. He then returned to Imp to direct *Little Nell's Tobacco*, the plot of which has been devoured by the moths. Uncle Carl raided Biograph to capture Mary Pickford, and selected Ince to direct her and her secret fiancé, Owen Moore, in *Their First Misunderstanding*.

When word spread that Kessel and Bauman were out to

seize talent, Ince borrowed a diamond ring and called upon the former turf experts. He wanted very much to be seized. The ex-layers of the Sheepshead Bay betting-ring admired Ince's diamond and promptly offered him \$100 a week.

Mr. Ince was not prepared for this immense bid. He suffered an immediate and complete vocal paralysis. The quondam guessers of equine performance mistook the Ince reticence for artistic scorn. Whereupon they sweetened the odds.

"Tell you what," said Brother Kessel, "we'll make it \$125 a week and a ten-per-cent cut in the Keystone company. What say?"

The Ince larynx became even more numb; a sort of death-rattle set in. The diamond ring bobbed on a palsied hand. The promoters now were convinced they had offended their sensitive caller.

Mr. Bauman came to the rescue. "Let's make it an even \$150 a week, plus the Keystone ten per cent. Huh?"

By dint of magnificent will-power, Mr. Ince overcame his laryngeal impotence and managed to say: "I'll have to think it over."

He wrote his acceptance next day in a note composed at a saloon, whence he had gone to minister to his throat and to recover from the shock.

When called upon to suggest a program, Ince recommended a series of thrillers, Western pictures with high-gearred action and a plethora of guns and horses. The Ince

backers agreed to this policy and despatched the new director to the bucolic acres of Edendale, Los Angeles, where the ill-kempt Bison studio lay, two blocks from the plant of Colonel Selig's floral diamond and yowling lions.

Ince made a one-reel picture, *The New Cook*, then burgeoned with a rousing Dead-eye Dick opus, *War on the Plains*. The latter production went over with a bang, and Ince decided to look for wider battlefields than the Edendale cow pasture, with its dilapidated shanties and rickety stage.

Colonel Selig meanwhile was developing Tom Mix, cowboy and United States marshal, into a star, who, by 1925, would command a salary of \$17,000 a week. Ince wanted to find a star the equal of Mix, but did not succeed until 1914, when he brought William S. Hart from the legitimate stage (*Trail of the Lonesome Pine*) to do *Two-Gun Hicks*. Hart soon thereafter surpassed all other screen bad men with hearts of gold.

Ince went in quest of mountain scenery as background for his next spectacle. He led his troupe to Santa Monica Canyon. En route thither, he saw a picturesque caravan, with long-horned cattle, curvetting horses, covered wagons and gaudy cowboys moving along the gully. He set up his cameras with showmanlike haste and began shooting extemporaneously—or, "off the cuff."

The outfit Ince saw and photographed was the famous Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Show. It was taking up winter quarters in the canyon. Ince was impressed. He entered nego-

tiations with the owners. He found that he could hire this entire show for \$2,100 a week, provided he guarantee a year's work. This seemed a tremendous and costly proposition, but Ince wired his backers, urging them to accept. That telegram is historic. It employed for the first time in movie history the adjective now used so extensively by producers when their pictures are fair-to-middling—"Colossal!"

Kessel and Bauman committed themselves to the Miller Brothers' contract—till then the biggest financial plunge made by the cinema. They authorized Ince to lease an eighteen-thousand-acre ranch on the shores of the Pacific beyond Santa Monica. That tract became Inceville, most famous of early picture plants. There Mr. Ince made his first Bison 101 Ranch picture, *Across the Plains*. It was an epic of arrows, powder, blood and just enough romantic honey to please America's devotees of mixed wrestling bouts.

Ince abandoned the Edendale property. Its nigger-town hovels were bequeathed to Sennett and his merry men. The latter were delayed in New York to await the outcome of a knock-down-and-drag-out feud between the forces of Kessel and Bauman and those of Uncle Carl Laemmle. That fight reached the sawed-off shot-gun dénouement in Los Angeles and the riot-call stage in New York.

Once Ince had begun to click with Deadwood Coach drama, Uncle Carl suggested that Kessel and Bauman pool their 101 Bison releases with his Imp features under the



banner of the Universal Film Manufacturing Company. The proposition was accepted.

Ince soon afterward filed a report with his chiefs, belittling the Laemmle assets.

"All they've got to offer," he told Kessel and Bauman, "is an anemic studio at Gower and Hollywood Boulevard. They're trying to grab off our great canyon for Western stuff and help themselves to all our fine wardrobe and equipment."

Kessel and Bauman withdrew from the Universal board at its second meeting. Epithets sailed through the air. Law-suits charging breach of contract were brought by Universal. Uncle Carl sent strong-arms down to the canyon to seize the place. Mr. Ince posted guards, armed with sawed-off shot-guns, while he went ahead with his blood-and-thunder epics for the screen. To impress intruders, Ince wheeled out a Civil War trench-mortar, stuffed it with iron-confetti, and threatened to touch it off. He fortified himself with a pistol said to have belonged to General Sheridan.

Laemmle's bravos deployed in a counter-movement on the almost defunct Edendale premises, where fist-fights and a bit of gunfire ensued. One man (an innocent bystander, of course) got a lead capsule in his kidney. The storm troops from Fort Laemmle opened the old Bison safe at Edendale but found nothing concealed except a flask of spirit-gum and some wisps of hair crêpe for false whiskers.

There were fights in New York, also, between the Laemmle

and Kessel and Bauman interests. A riot on June 28, 1912, brought the Manhattan gendarmes to No. 251 West Nineteenth street, the offices of the former turfmen. Brass knuckles were no mere ornaments.

Finally, in the autumn, there was a truce. Kessel and Bauman settled for \$17,000, kept their trade-mark of 101 Bison, and obtained a commercial divorce from Uncle Carl. Sennett and his troubadours then hastened West.

Many legends have it that Sennett *walked* into Los Angeles *broke*. The fact is he traveled first class and in a Pullman lower. He had a reasonably large expense account. It was not large enough, however, for in Chicago he again had to pawn his faithful diamond ring and leave a satchelful of toggerly as an earnest of good faith.

All the way across the Middle West, Mack looked out on the prairie-dog hills and brooded. Ince's success with rip-roaring spectacles was significant of the public's tastes in entertainment.

"Comedy or no comedy," Mack said to his subordinates, "we've got to crash through with something that looks like a spectacle."

"What'll it be?" asked Fred Mace. "We got no big cast."

"It's *got* to be a spectacle. Something bigger'n big."

Sennett could talk of nothing but "spectacles." It became an obsession. The conductor thought Mack had lost his reading glasses and recommended an optician in Los Angeles. Sennett kept right on worrying about "spectacles." He had

only four actors: Mabel Normand, Ford Sterling, Fred Mace and Pathé Lehrman—a shoestring, and what he needed was a pair of high boots.

Mack was in a sour humor as he stepped off the Santa Fe train at Los Angeles. He hired a taxi and gave directions to go at once to the Alexandria Hotel. Then he heard a band playing. Fifes and drums! And then, as the taxicab stopped for traffic, he saw a line of marching men. Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!

"Quick," said Sennett, "I don't know what it's about, but get out the camera, Pathé."

"It's the G.A.R.," said the taxicab driver. "They've got a convention here this week, and the big parade's this morning."

"God bless them!" said Sennett. "It's our *spectacle*!"

Bags and boxes were opened in the taxicab. "Follow us as best you can," Sennett said to the driver. "Don't tip anyone off to who we are or what we're doing."

Sennett already had had in mind a story concerning a janitor and a policeman fighting for love. He changed the policeman rôle to that of a passionate Grand Army man.

"You'll be the Grand Army man," he said to Sterling. "Mace is the janitor. Just go in and out of the parade, run, fall and keep mugging."

It was a warm day, but Mack made Sterling wear a dark blue overcoat, with the collar upturned to simulate a uniform. Mack saw a veteran about to collapse from exertion

and heat. He sent Mace over to "assist the poor chap." Mace came back with the warrior's hat, which helped vastly to make Sterling look the part of a soldier. The chapeau was too small, and the effect all the more grotesque.

During the parade, Pathé Lehrman set up the camera at various street corners. He elbowed the sidewalk crowds and explained to the dubious police that he was the official photographer for the G.A.R. Meanwhile Sterling, Mace, Mack and Mabel staged California's first comedy chase, in and out among the marchers.

After the parade, Sennett treated his staff to a late luncheon at a hot-dog stand. He said:

"Let's finish up this thing this afternoon. We can go to the hotel later on."

He took the company to Edendale, helped a carpenter throw together some makeshift scenery and then photographed additional episodes. Sennett decided on another chase as a grand finale to his picture. He looked up from the Edendale stage toward a hill at the rear of the studio property. He had it! A skyline chase.

Mabel, Mace, Sterling, Sennett and the carpenter ran along the top of this hill. A crowd of neighborhood gardeners and school-children participated, free of charge. Sennett told the unpaid recruits what an honor it would be to appear in motion pictures. They immediately became incurable screen actors.

In subsequent pictures they wanted *money* as well as *honor*.

Among the children to participate in this chase was Louise Fazenda. She took an afternoon off from a nearby school to become an actress. Three years afterward she was a Sennett star.

Sennett wired Kessel and Bauman :

"Arrived this morning and got spectacle by evening."

The telegram was garbled, and "spectacle" became "pickled." When the backers received this intelligence, they felt cheaply betrayed. A comedy director should have decency enough to remain the soberest of fellows, they thought.

"He means he's drunk and got pinched," moaned Kessel.

They wired back: "Put out some good comedies and quit antagonizing the authorities by too much drinking."

However, when they received Mack's seven hundred and fifty feet of film, they were astonished and highly gratified. The masterpiece was called *The Grand Army of the Republic*; Sennett became Keystone's white-haired boy, and Ford Sterling's reputation as a comedian was assured.

Thanks to the box-office success of the Grand Army spectacle, Sennett now could afford a long-dreamed-of luxury—an automobile. If there was anything he wanted, besides a huge bathtub in his office, it was an automobile. He decided to get the machine first and reserve his dream of the bathtub as an incentive. He purchased a second-hand *Fiat*.

He drove over to Inceville to show off for the benefit of his friend, Tom Ince. Ince had his company at work on the side of a steep and high hill. Sennett drove up and became mired. Ince had to supply twelve horses to get Mack out of the muck.

On the way back to Edendale, Sennett was arrested for speeding. He had a friend, however, the District Attorney, who squared matters for him. The arresting officer later applied to Sennett for a job as a movie extra. He was thrown off the lot, crying anathema upon the head of Thespis and his demented disciples.

His brush with the police reminded Sennett of a cherished plan to put the gendarmes into pictures. He announced that he was going to have a comedy police force. He appointed Ford Sterling chief. From that day until the coming of sound pictures some of the foremost screen comedians began their successes as Keystone Cops. The original Keystone flatfeet were Billy Hauber, Billy Gilbert, Slim Summerville, Bobby Dunn, Charles Avery and Charlie Parrott (now Charlie Chase).

"We got to have a patrol wagon, too," said Mack. He had a passion for second-hand machines; so he purchased a used Black Maria, a two-cylinder crook's victoria.

In view of Mack's deep love for police portrayals, one might assume he would serve on his own police force. However, he appeared as a Keystone Cop in only one picture. That

was when he played with Nick Cogley, afterward a successful and very hard-boiled Keystone Comedy director.

Sennett's screen appearances were becoming few and far between. For one thing he was tremendously busy with a growing concern, and besides he had attained a position which, in his opinion, called for a certain amount of executive dignity. He fraternized less and less with his actors and began to develop a patriarchal and pedagogical manner. The imperial frown was gathering on his brow. Sycophants began to call him the "King of Comedy."

One day a scrawny, cross-eyed fellow named Ben Turpin applied for a job. Sennett was very superstitious and kept his fingers crossed all the time Turpin talked. Mack wanted to hire Ben, but feared that ill luck might follow. Finally he put him to work as a janitor. Later he allowed the angle-orbed aspirant to take a trial ride on the back step of the patrol wagon.

"None of our cops are game enough to jump from that step and land on their backsides," said Sennett. "If you do a good, high fall from that step and don't break your tail, I'll give you a job in the pictures."

Turpin got on the patrol, leaped until the horizon could be seen below his flying rump, then landed hard. He got up, caught the patrol and took another sensational pratt-fall. Again he jumped and landed. And again and again. In fact, Sennett and Mace had to restrain him from more leaps.

"It was pretty good," said Sennett, with characteristic understatement. "The job is yours."

The Leaping Lena feats of Turpin aroused the envy of the other cops, all of whom were great and furious tumblers. This led to impromptu contests to determine who could endure the most fantastic falls. Sometimes the comedians would vie with one another on the sidewalks of Edendale, much to the amazement of the civilians.

Turpin did not confine his leaping practices to the lot or the sidewalks. He used to simulate a high-diving epilepsy and fall from the platforms of street cars. The trolley crews would be terrified. Once he staggered to the tracks and sun-fished directly in the path of an approaching car. The motor-man ground the brakes and Turpin rolled from the right-of-way just in time to escape injury. He quickly wriggled beneath the trucks of the now-stalled car and pretended he had been run over. Someone called an ambulance, and when the doctor leaned over Turpin to examine him, Ben opened his very cross eyes and almost scared the surgeon to death. Tramway officials requested Sennett to keep Turpin off their tracks.

"He's a menace," said the Inspector. "He breaks our motormen's morale."

Although he had not yet developed his sensational bathing-beauty sequences, Sennett had an inkling of that idea when he saw Mabel Normand perform in a bathing suit. She was



an excellent diver and swimmer. Sennett found that audiences enjoyed a certain amount of athletic girlhood, together with the comedy of the Keystone Cops. Experiences in burlesque houses told him that his judgment was sound in this respect.

He hired a few young ladies to appear with the cops in water scenes. He took a water comedy at a seaside resort, and so marked was the box-office response that Sennett wrote to Kessel and Bauman:

"I'm going to collect some of the prettiest girls in the world for bathing-beauty comedies. I think we ought to enlarge our studio. In particular I want a concrete swimming pool and a new office with suitable plumbing. We're outgrowing the shacks and the old stage."

Kessel and Bauman advised Mack to be patient. He would be given better buildings and more land.

"I'll get a big bathtub and a rubbing board in my office, too," he told Mabel Normand. "There's nothing like a good bath to make a man think."

Ford Sterling now was one of the three most popular comedians on the screen. One of his rivals was the good-natured and corpulent John Bunny, former shoe-string salesman, minstrel and stage-player of the part of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Bunny was with Vitagraph, and cavorted opposite slim Flora Finch. Sterling's other competitor for laughs was Max Linder, the French comedian.

Sennett always regarded Linder as one of the best comedians of all time. It is said by some—among them Mrs. D. W. Griffith—that Sennett imitated Linder in his own early efforts on the screen. Linder came to America in 1917, to work for Essanay, failed signally and returned to Paris, where he and his wife committed suicide in 1925.

Mack Swain, one of the most consistently funny comedians, was discovered at about this time by Sennett, as also was the vital Polly Moran. Another notable to join the Sennett group was Walter Wright, a director, subsequently one of the foremost experts on color photography.

The usual Keystone Comedies ran for five hundred feet. When a picture of this length did not strike Mack as comical enough, he would shorten it to two hundred and fifty feet and fill in the rest of his allotted space with educational features, such as the canning of tuna fish or the handiwork of the Zuzi Indians.

## Chapter 12

### SEE THEM RUN

A POPULAR comedian, whom we find it expedient to call Bert Landish, went to work for Sennett early in 1913. We do not withhold his real name for reasons pertaining to Bert's immorality; on the contrary, we must guard his identity because he *was moral*.

Hollywood—known as Dr. Satan's principal terrestrial clinic—never had a citizen more discreet, a man more virtuous than Comedian Landish. He did not drink hard cider, curse when maimed, nor engage in haystack charades.

His wife was obstreperously jealous. She was wont to humiliate her spouse with absurd claims that he had risked an eye during the Santa Anna winds. These Southern California monsoons race in from the Mojave Desert to distrib-

ute pollen among sex-starved posies and molest the skirts of the fair. Landish suffered with droll complacency his wife's green-eyed heckling. He was a saint, even if he *didn't* undergo the usual saintly yearnings for lessons in comparative anatomy. In short, he was the answer to the censor's prayer.

He even tried to avoid comedians who swilled liquor, philandered with charwomen and social leaders and then bragged about it. He also sought refinement and delicate conversational habits among his women co-workers. Perhaps Mabel Normand was the only girl whose fire-eating manners and blunt aphorisms did not distress Mr. Landish. He was sure that Mabel's monkeyshines masked a very fine and clean spirit.

The girl that Bert shunned beyond all others was a young and blithe newcomer to the lot. Sennett had hired her as a bathing beauty. And once again discretion compels us, against our will, to give the lady a name of our own design. I shall call her Mildred Golden, after a matron who once caught me peeking through a hole in her window-shade and told my grandmother. (God bless Granny, who said: "The lad has to learn these secrets sometime.")

Keystone's Millie was beloved by many men, none of whom wished to insult her intelligence with offers of marriage. She, in turn, responded whole-heartedly to all invitations, including ice cream debauches. Despite her apparent promiscuity, Millie wanted most of all to be alone with Bert.

She said she loved him even more ardently than she did a certain Santa Barbara grocer, with whom she spent week-ends.

One day Millie felt that she was in trouble. Instead of going to one of the several males of Los Angeles County who might well have been responsible for her plight, she consulted her politico-legal representative, the District Attorney!

"I want to make a complaint against a certain fellow," she said.

"On what grounds?" asked the District Attorney.

She was very grim and precise. "Seduction!"

The District Attorney was impressed by her beauty, her charm, her choice of words and her choice of grounds. "How old are you?"

"Seventeen, last May."

"Oho!" said the public prosecutor. "Where do you work?"

"At the Keystone Picture studio, No. 1712 Allesandro street."

The District Attorney was aghast. Not only had he formed a friendship for Mr. Sennett, following the time he had interceded for him in the automobile-speeding incident, but he also was well acquainted with several comedians on the Keystone lot.

"This is a very serious charge," said the District Attorney. "Would you wait right here for a moment?"

He retired to an ante-room and called up Mr. Sennett.

"Hello, Mack. Does a girl named Millie Golden work for you?"

"Millie Golden?" said Mack. "Why, yes. She's one of my bathing girls. Why you asking?"

"She's in my office now, Mack. In a jam. You know? Cupid! And she's going to swear out a complaint and name the man. She's only seventeen, she says, a minor, and you know what *that* means for somebody? San Quentin Penitentiary!"

We leave the District Attorney's confessional and "cut" to Mack Sennett's office, where we find the King of Comedy as pale as dough and in a state of confusion. Not that *he* was guilty of the great seduction, but he felt certain that *somebody*—anybody—was.

After he had partially recovered from the shock, Mack scurried from his office. The first man he bumped into was Bert Landish, the monogomist.

"Get your things, Bert. We got to leave the country!"

Bert was understandably distrait. "Leave the country? Why?"

Mr. Sennett shouted: "Rape!"

The word stunned Mr. Landish. "But, Mr. Sennett . . . Why . . ."

"No time for 'buts' and 'whys.' Shake a leg. We're beating it. The whole gang! Now."

Mack ran up and down the lot, kicking at shanty doors,

stomping on stages and acting as a horseless Paul Revere.

Bert had caught up with him. "My wife won't let me leave the country."

"The hell with her!" said Sennett. "You gotta come."

"But where?"

"I dunno. Some place where they got no extradition treaty. Mexico. Yeah. Lower California, where all the criminals hide."

Mack decided that Mabel Normand and Polly Moran must come along to Lower California.

"Great heavens, Moike," said Mabel, "you don't think the D.A. suspects *me*, do you?"

Mack made a categorical answer. "Everybody's guilty till they're proved innocent; that's the law. Come on now. Hey, boys! Boys! Sterling! Mace! Pathé! Pack up the camera and some film."

"Where to, Master?" asked Pathé.

Mack called for his *Fiat* car. "No time for clowning, Pathé. Pile in and tell the others to follow to Tia Juana. It's a matter of life or death—or San Quentin, which is both."

Mack herded Bert, Mabel, Polly, Mace, Pathé and Sterling into his car, together with the photographic equipment. He stepped on the gas and raced toward San Diego. He paused there for more fuel, and never stopped until they were across the Mexican boundary line. Other members of the company followed as best they could; some of them

begged rides from farmers and tourists. Mabel and Polly were the only ladies among the refugees.

On their arrival at Tia Juana, Mack's party found an insurrection in the making. A group of American bandits and renegades were stirring up the Mexicans to revolt against the government. The town was an armed camp. The ring-leader was an American named Zeph Crocker, wanted in the United States for several murders and numerous bank holdups.

Several shots were fired and much ugly comment made as Mack drove up to the inn. That hostelry was crowded. The manager said he didn't know where the applicants might find rooms. Bandit Crocker appeared on the scene to accuse Mack of being an officer sent to round up his gang. It might have gone badly for Mack had not Crocker recognized Sterling.

"Hello, pal," said the bandit to Mr. Sterling, "you're the funny Dutchman. I seen yah in the movies."

Mr. Crocker commanded the manager of the inn to take care of the party. Mabel and Polly shared a room. It harbored a single bed and a spider that came out of a crack in the wall to do setting-up exercises. Sennett, Mace and Pathé were given a small room where rats as big as beavers could be heard as they chewed at the wainscoting.

"Why don't you confess?" Sennett asked Bert. "Then we'd all be cleared of suspicion about Millie."

Bert did not see the joke. "Mr. Sennett, monkeying with women is something I never do. Even if I *was* tempted, my wife would crucify me."



The bandit leader was happy to have met Sterling. He decreed that Ford share his room. He led Sterling to a foul-smelling chamber, where a girl was sleeping off a *mescal* binge.

"Does she interest you any, brother?" asked the bandit.

"No, thanks," said Sterling.

"Okay, then," said Mr. Crocker, who awakened his sweetheart with a boot that any Princeton place-kicker might have coveted. "Get up, dog-meat, and go sleep in the patio."

As the intoxicated lady limped out, rubbing her hip, Mr. Crocker looked after her and said: "Women take an awful lot for granted, don't they?"

Mack and his troupe started to make a picture in Lower California, so as not to fall behind schedule. There was no word from Los Angeles, and Sennett hoped for the best. Meanwhile the threat of revolution grew more pronounced. There were hourly brawls in the streets, cock-fights, gambling quarrels, stabbings, shootings and a general air of drunken bedlam. Once a firing squad performed their fatal office beneath Sennett's window.

Sterling became hollow-eyed and miserable. He explained to Mack that he was getting little or no sleep.

"Why crab about it?" asked Mack. "Who *is* getting any sleep? Look at *me*, in bed with big-belly Mace and nervous Pathé. He squirms like a garter snake and yells all night for somebody named Winnie. Say, *you* got all the best of it."

"Like hell!" said Sterling. "This here Crocker keeps the kerosene lamp burning all night. It smarts my eyes and smells so bad I want to throw up."

When Sterling complained of the lamp to Crocker, the bandit said: "I can't help it, buddy. I simply gotta sleep with the light on. My mother used to leave it burning after she sung me to sleep. I sure missed the old lady after they sent her up."

"To prison?" asked Sterling.

"She cooled off the old man after he made a pass at her wid a jug. Self-defense pure an' simple, but they put her away. That's justice for yah! Sweet woman, too. The old man was a grease ball. Glad she croaked him. Sorry about that lamp. But she stays lit. See?"

Mr. Crocker always slept with lots of pistols, rifles and knives. He had a *machete*, a razor-sharp weapon, of which he was very proud. He wore it in his belt whenever he sallied forth. Some of this hardware was bound to poke Sterling in the ribs if he dared to stir an inch during the night.

There was a climax to Ford Sterling's disquieting experiences one morning shortly before dawn. Bandit Crocker had left the room at midnight, and Sterling had taken a desperate chance and blown out the light. He was getting his first sound sleep in a week when Crocker jabbed him in the side with the hilt of the *machete*.

"Whatcha mean turnin' out the lamp?" asked the bandit.

Sterling sat up as the bandit re-lighted the lamp. "What? Oh, the *lamp*! It must of blown out in the wind."

"Yeah?" said Crocker. "There ain't been as much wind as a baby's sneeze for three whole days. Don't do it no more, see?"

Sterling was about to speak, but suddenly looked at Crocker's hands—at his hands, his wrinkled duck trousers and frowsy linen coat. They were splotched with blood! Sterling could not speak.

Mr. Crocker grumbled a bit as he fitted the flue more snugly to the burner. "Okay, Sterling. We'll forget it this oncet. Now move over. I'm all wore out." He yawned. "That God damned Jap!"

Sterling's teeth were doing a death-house tap dance. "Ain't you . . . going to . . . to . . . wash . . . u-u-u-up?"

Crocker raised his brows critically. "What's this? Say, you ain't gettin' choosey? Move over. I'm turnin' in as is, and don't cop a sneak wid that light, see? Goo' night."

Mr. Crocker lay down, then snorted and got up again to take off his boots. "I got a big callus on my toe. Did you ever get a callus?" Lacking a reply, he began to soliloquize. "The damned rat of a Jap! He had it comin' to him."

Mr. Sterling ventured an inquiry. "Is he in . . . a hospital?"

Crocker had taken both boots off, but indicated that was as far as he would go with disrobing. "*Hospital?* Yeah. A

hospital shaped like a roundhouse. I put him head first in a rain-barrel."

Crocker began to laugh. "He didn't have a chancet to open his yap. The double-crosser! I set him up las' month as a dope peddler and give him a cargo of hop to run across the border. What does he do? Comes back and claims the customs men confiscated the mud but let *him* escape." Mr. Crocker hurled both boots to the floor, startling a mouse in a corner. "Huh! I'll say he escaped." He cupped his hands and halloed to the startled mouse as it streaked down a hole in the floor. "Hey, mousie! Your brother escaped!"

Mr. Sterling sat up, startled by the address to the mouse, by the wild look in Crocker's eyes and by the blood. The bandit continued:

"I chase him into the patio, the skunk! I give him the *machete* and cut his head off like a gourd. Then I chuck him into the rain-barrel."

Mr. Sterling lay back on his lumpy pillow. He covered his eyes with his hands. Mr. Crocker studied this gesture and said: "What's the matter wid you, anyways? Can't you stand this light?"

"My eyes smart, that's all," said Sterling. "They got strained all day in the sun."

"The sun gets you at first down here," said Crocker, who rose to go to the window. He put his foot on the sill and massaged his callus. "Gee, it's breakin' daylight already. Ain't it quiet? Just the birds and roosters. Azevedo's bird

won the cock-fight today. That's five straight. You'd never t'ink the sun'd be hot as hell in a few hours. It used to get awful hot in Nebraska, too. It was 103 the day of my old lady's sentence. That horse-faced judge says to her . . . Hey, Sterling, you asleep yet?"

Mr. Sterling moaned: "Not quite."

Mr. Crocker was pointing out the window and chuckling. "Say, you can see the rain-barrel from here. Want to get up and take a peek before they come to lug him to the morgue? God almighty, but his gams look funny hangin' over the rim, like Hallowe'en at the reformatory when the super used to let us bob for apples. He's got a mighty big *tokus* for a Jap. Come on, Sterling, and give a look."

Mr. Sterling sat upright and screamed: "*Mein Gott in Himmel!*"

The bandit was mystified. "Excuse me. If your glims smart that bad, I'll douse the lamp. It's daylight anyways."

One more week passed and a visitor whom all the troupe knew came to Tia Juana. She was Miss Bess Meredyth, a newspaper woman who afterward became a motion-picture actress. (Today she is a first-flight scenarist and the wife of Michael Curtiz, director.)

Bess found Mabel and Polly in their two-by-four room at the flimsy hotel. Mabel was sitting in a rheumatic rocking-chair, crying softly. Bess started to sit on the edge of the bed, but Polly seized her arm.

"Don't sit there, Bess. You'll go away from here alive with bugs."

Bess asked Mabel what was wrong. "Homesick?"

"She's low in the mind," said Polly.

"I almost got put in jail this afternoon," said Mabel.

"What for?"

Mabel dabbed her eyes. "Damned if I know. I was driving Moike's car, and all I did was *run over a policeman*."

Miss Meredyth sympathized. "They must be getting touchy down here. Well, children, I'm here to do a story on the revolution for a newspaper syndicate. By the way, *why* did Mack drag *you* down to *this* hole in the map?"

"To get away from trouble," said Mabel.

"Get *away*?" said Bess. "Looks as though he put you right in the middle of it. What trouble?"

"Who do you think you're kidding?" asked Mabel. "*You* know what trouble."

"No, I don't," said Bess. "Honestly I don't."

"I'm sceptical," said Mabel. "You surely heard of the squawk that Golden girl made."

"Oh," said Bess. "Yes, I know about *that*. But what's it got to do with *you* folks?"

When the situation was made clear, Bess laughed. "Haven't you people read the papers?"

"I brought a *Police Gazette* with me," said Mabel. "It's the only library in this charming oasis."

"Well," said Bess, "I think Mack can take you home to-

morrow. The Golden girl *did* make a complaint, but she named the owner of a grocery store in Santa Barbara. Not a word about Keystone romances. He's been indicted by the grand jury."

When Mack heard the news, the burden of a hundred years rolled from his soul. None the less, he said they would wait in Tia Juana until he had confirmed the report. Meanwhile he would make some additional shots to pictorialize an idea prompted by Ford Sterling's touching story of the Jap in the rain-barrel.

While the company was completing the picture among the cactus fields, Bert Landish sat on a mound several yards from the camera. He suddenly let out a yell and began to pound at his pants violently.

"Something's got me!" he howled. "It's terrific!"

"Where?" asked Sennett. "What is it?"

"Something's chewing on me," screamed Bert, running about in pain, and slapping at his trousers. "An ant with red-hot pincers."

"Can't you tell us where?" asked Mack.

Bert pointed to the ladies of the troupe. "I can't tell you now. But it's awful."

After the troupe had returned to the Keystone lot and the shadows of San Quentin were forgotten, Bert Landish reported at Sennett's office. He said his wife was contemplating a divorce.

"What's eating on her *now*?" asked Mack.

Mr. Landish was in an indigo mood. "She claims I was unfaithful to her in Mexico."

Mack pooh-poohed. "She ought to have her brains examined. I'll talk to her. *You*, of all people! It's insane."

"It's no use, Mr. Sennett. She has proof."

"*Proof*? What you talking about?"

"That insect-bite. She claims I contracted a disorder."

"That's crazy," said Mack. "I admit it's peculiar, but didn't you tell her an ant bit you?"

"Sure I told her."

"And what did she say?"

"She sneered and said: 'Insect!' and walked out on me."

Four years after the Tia Juana junket, and when Mr. Hampden Del Ruth was Sennett's general studio overseer and casting director, a heavy vamp was needed for a picture. Del Ruth finally found a girl he thought would do. She was very tight-lipped and glumly mysterious. She sat and watched Del Ruth with a morose stare.

"I know you can do just what we want for this picture," said Del Ruth, "and Mr. Sennett will okay you, I know."

She seemed astonished. "Mr. Sennett has to okay me?"

"Oh, yes. Just a formality. He has the final word on everybody around here."

She rose. "Well," she said. "Just tell Mr. Sennett that *Millie Golden* dropped in. So long."



## Chapter 13

### EVERY DAY IS SATURDAY NIGHT

A FILMIST who could make one hundred and four successful motion pictures during his first year of production was entitled to Hollywood's greatest rewards.

Sennett had issued that number of comedies under the Keystone seal, and, late in 1913, felt that Kessel and Bauman should give him his heart's desire—an office bathtub of generous displacement. They were delighted with this conceit and placed an order for a tub to measure eight feet from stem to stern, six feet of beam and drawing five feet. Sennett was as happy about his indoor yacht as J. P. Morgan, the elder, with a new *Corsair*.

Modern Hollywood's mark of distinction is the swimming pool. In the early days of cinematic affluence, the bathtub at-

tested to a man's calibre and social standing. The more ornate and the more vast the tub, the greater respect one commanded among his fellows.

The bathtub rivalry reached its all-time zenith while the world was at war and when Actor Charles Ray commissioned the jewelry firm of Tiffany to lay down the keel of a *cut-glass tub*! It was, in a manner of speaking, a gem. Jimmy Starr, the encyclopedic newspaper columnist, tells me it cost \$60,000; that the Tiffany ladlers tried three times at the moulds before they could obtain a crystal-clear vat. It required as much precision in the casting as the pampered lens of an astronomical observatory.

After this Kohinoor of the toilet was set in the Ray residence, a group of Italian glass-cutters went to work on its transparent bosom. These lavatory Cellinis graved thereon filigrees and lacy motifs until the sides of the tub looked like—what shall we say?—looked like the Virgin Queen Elizabeth's underthings (if I may rely on an unpublished memoir attributed to Essex).

The Ray reservoir threatened the attending plumbers with nervous breakdown when they began to swab pipe joints in its neighborhood. Even chrome-steel is not impervious to plumber's tools, and this vessel was of glass! After a conference, one sanitary engineer suggested the insulation of Stillson wrenches with rubber cushions. Another efficiency man wanted to encase the workmen's hands in boxing gloves. A third pipe-and-pot man (a candidate for the Academy of

Motion Picture Arts and Sciences award) solved the quandary by reverting to first principles—he forgot his tools entirely.

Although Sennett did not go in for cut-glass troughs or china tubs suggestive of the Ming Dynasty, he most certainly out-stripped all other connoisseurs in respect to *size* of hygienic utensils. His tub was big enough to commit suicide in without suffering a cramp.

When the Sennett dreadnought had been delivered on a safe-mover's truck, drawn by six steaming Percherons, Mack realized he must have a place worthy of its porcelain grandeur. The studio barracks till then consisted of a barn, a small store-building that served as an office, a cutting and projection room which resembled the birthplace of Daniel Boone, and a two-room house, one chamber of which was Mabel Normand's dressing room, and the other that of the Keystone Cops.

Mack put his bathtub in drydock while artisans began to rear a new administration building. It was to be two stories high, with a gymnasium on the roof, and a *tower*. This tower would be his office. In it would be a rubbing board, a steam chamber and his precious and Gargantuan tub. A small desk and a few plain chairs were afterthoughts.

When the men had built the Tower, it was learned to everyone's dismay that they couldn't get the great tub through any normal door or window. So they removed one wall of the Tower, set up cranes, block-and-tackle, derricks,

hoists, and brought a donkey engine to the scene. Sennett barked orders like a Bavarian major getting a gun-carriage up the Alps.

What an imposing bathroom-office the Tower was! From its windows the King of Comedy could look down upon the new stages to see that his vassals were properly at work. All sets were erected out of doors and shielded by white muslin to diffuse the sunlight. The reflectors, also, were of muslin, with an occasional mirror. No one had thought of silver leaf, gold leaf, tin or aluminum for this purpose.

The actors reported at nine o'clock in the morning and were not required to put on their make-up until assured that the sun would spend the day with them. And whenever some weary mime wanted to go home, he would suggest that the sun was "getting kinda yellow," and the camera man, nine times out of ten, would agree and shut up shop.

It was to prevent such derelictions as "early quitting"—as well as to find sanctuary for the big bathtub—that led Sennett to build his Tower. He could scrutinize everybody and everything from that crow's nest.

This sort of watchfulness grew with Sennett's every achievement. He had much of the headmaster's iron in his blood. Success brought to him an austere loneliness. He was very lenient in certain respects, encouraged temperament and wanted his troupe to have a good time, but in some ways he was a ruthless disciplinarian. There was no question as to

who was the boss. The troupe now referred to Sennett as "The Old Man"—in off-stage whispers, of course.

Sennett had two hard-and-fast rules: No drinking on the lot, and no love-making. Male players were forbidden to be seen off the grounds with bathing beauties. The penalty for a bacchanalian lapse was a mere reprimand; the punishment for dalliance with Aphrodite was loud and sudden dismissal.

Sennett always had whiskey and beer in his bathroom-headquarters, but no one else—with one exception—could have a similar luxury on the premises. The lone exception was Joe Jackson, the tramp comedian. Joe was an Austrian and liked his beer.

During Jackson's first day at Keystone, an express wagon, laden to the gunwales with Pilsner barrels, a beer-pump, copper coils and other pot-house fittings, started through the main gate. Sennett's watchman stopped the driver.

"Nix," said the watchman. "The Old Man don't allow no booze."

Jackson went to the Tower to resign. Sennett then ruled that Jackson alone might have beer. The rule was tempered with the admonishment that Jackson's tippling be done behind closed doors.

This pontifical decision proved a godsend to other thirsty comedians. Not only did they partake of Joe's beer, but kept caches of liquor in his dressing room.

"I can't understand why some of the boys look pie-eyed all the time," Sennett complained. "I *know* they got no booze

on the lot. Maybe they're sissies and can't shake off a hang-over."

Sennett held morning conferences in the Tower, while he floated in the water of his tub or lay upon the rubbing board. He often invited favored employes to *get in the tub with him*. Up to his neck in water, he liked to talk over a last night's pre-view while his cutter sat opposite him.

"There's nothing quite as stimulating as a bath," he would say.

Although he stayed up late, Mack was an early riser. He was constitutionally strong and took excellent care of himself. He went for long walks, boxed and rode horseback. He hired a trainer, a hulking fellow named Abdul the Turk, to pound his muscles after the bath.

Abdul Maljan was a native of Harpoot, Turkey. He had been a semi-windup prize fighter, a wrestler and then a trainer at Joe Mellet's pugilistic camp at San Bruno, a San Francisco suburb. Among others, he had conditioned the great Stanley Ketchel.

On Abdul's first day with Sennett, he was assigned to go horseback riding with the boss. Abdul was not a gentleman jockey by any means, but he had become inured to the whims of eccentric employers.

"You ever been on a horse?" asked Mack.

"Plenty times," said Abdul. "I ride the beeg Arabian stud-horse in Harpoot."

The horses were brought over from Curly Eagle's stables, not far from Silver Lake. Abdul had some difficulty in getting aboard; the horse did not like to be mounted from the right side. It is quite possible the steed did not like Abdul, who never had been in a saddle till this fine morning.

No sooner had Abdul settled his broad beam than the horse decided to run away. Sennett didn't realize that the Turk's charger was going on his own. Mack started in pursuit, shouting: "You damn fool, Turk! What's the matter? You crazy?"

Abdul did not choose to reply. He tried to affix a deterring strangle-hold upon his palfrey, but gave an Ichabod Crane exhibition which inspired in the horse a still greater zeal for flight.

A group of Mexican truck-gardeners were among their placid spinach when Abdul's horse chose that field for his cross-country run. The animal plunged through the truck-garden, with Sennett five lengths behind. The air was full of spinach, oaths and Mexicans. The furious gallop did not end until Abdul's horse reached his home-stall at Curly Eagle's barn.

"What in hell was the matter with you?" Sennett asked.

The Turk was sweating and panting. "I pull and I pull like hell and can no stop de horse."

Sennett examined the bridle of Abdul's whinnying beast and began to laugh. "No wonder! There's no chin-strap."

Mack now was thirty-four years old, weighed almost 200 pounds and had a telling punch. But he was not wantonly pugnacious. Like most powerful men, he could afford to pass off lightly the threats of less brawny soreheads.

One day while sparring with Abdul, he hit his partner's chin harder than he had intended. Abdul got boiling mad and rushed at Sennett. Mack backed away, held out a parrying left hand and said: "Careful there, Turk. Look out for your job, or you'll knock yourself out!"

Abdul stopped midway in his rush. In a flash he translated Sennett's remarks into idiomatic Turkish. In his language, too, discretion is the better part of commerce. Economic determinism has been known to make the best of professionals pull their punches. Abdul almost lost his balance but saved his job.

Among the improvements at the Edendale home of comedy was the big concrete bathing pool that stood a few yards from Allesandro street. Today it is a gray ruin, with ivy growing outside its cracked retaining wall. The smooth cement facing is breaking away from the inside wall and the old basin is one-third full of rubbish, fit to curdle the wits of archeologists or of those scientists who so nimbly reconstruct the skull of a Piltdown man from a chip of bone.

It is difficult to believe that a great company of celebrated stars once created laughs for the millions in this pool. Marie



Dressler, Charlie Chaplin, Wallace Beery, Gloria Swanson, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Mabel Normand, Ford Sterling, Harry Langdon, Phyllis Haver, Eddie Foy and the little Foy, W. C. Fields, Ben Turpin, Mack Swain, Chester Conklin, Joe Jackson, Al St. John, Harold Lloyd, Willie Collier, Sr., Sam Bernard, Hale Hamilton, Raymond Hitchcock, Fred Mace, Weber and Fields, Lew Cody, Marie Prevost, Louise Fazenda, Syd Chaplin, Bobby Dunn, Polly Moran, Bebe Daniels, Eddie Quillen, Buster Keaton, Charlie Murray, Hal Roach . . . so many, many more there were! What modern producer can claim a list so impressive?

The dressing rooms of the stars adjoined this plunge, and on Saturday afternoons the Thespians would jump from their porches into its waters.

On the spring day when I went with Jimmy Starr, Sennett's one-time office boy, to look over the ruins of the deserted lot, it was as though a lost civilization lay buried beneath the kitchen-middens of Edendale. The old pool seemed a sacrificial pit of a weird and vanished race.

One peers over the crumbling ledge to see an obscene medley of warped and rusty gutters, sere palm leaves, tin cans, a bucket with remnants of ancient mortar bulging its bottom, discarded wash tubs, a section of bashed-in stove pipe, the dented hood of an automobile radiator of a forgotten make, the rim of a derby hat, a ruptured water-boiler, a bicycle frame, whiskey-bottle shards, coils of elevator cable,

parts of an antiquated projection machine, tire fragments, dry branches, a broken ladder, a cracked porcelain basin, a tangle of barbed-wire, aged and crumpled newspapers, burlap sacks, screens from long-decayed doors, rotten boards, and that last symbol of all ephemeral art—a dunghill.

## *Chapter 14*

### FOLLOW IN FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

**F**ORD STERLING called at the Tower one morning to confer with Mr. Sennett. Abdul the Turk was kneading his master's bread-basket with coarse salt. Mr. Sterling sat beside the table to witness this interesting treatment. He declined a bath and said he had reached an important conclusion:

"I feel the lack of music." Sterling paused, then sighed: "An utter lack."

"Turn over, Mr. Sennett," said Abdul. "We give the back some, hey?"

The King of Comedy rolled over on his back and yawned. "Put a little more pressure on it, Abdul. There. That's got it."

"Sure," said Abdul. "Then we go in the steam some more, hey?"

Mr. Sterling studied the two nude gentlemen critically. "I guess you didn't hear me, Mack. I said I feel the lack of music."

"I didn't deny it, did I?" asked Mack.

"I think music would revolutionize my work."

"Well, go ahead and sing."

Mr. Sterling was very solemn. "I got a brand-new idea for comedy, something different, something for the soul."

"Yeah?" said Mack. "Well, don't you think our souls are doing pretty good the way they are?"

"No," said Sterling. "Frankly, I don't."

"Oh, you don't, eh? Well, let's have it. What's on your mind except music for the soul?"

"Griffith always gets his actors in a mood with violins and organs."

Sennett snorted. "Sure. But would an orchestra help you with a chase, or while you're getting hit with a brick?"

Sterling sat forward on his chair. "I want to do the next picture all by myself. Something artistic."

The rubbing-table jiggled and Sennett said: "Quit shoving the table, Abdul."

"I wasn't shoving anything, boss. It just happened by itself."

Sennett then said to Sterling: "Music would make our comedies slow, and we can't risk it. Remember, the public



swallows our impossible gags because we throw 'em fast and top 'em one after the other. Once we stop to let anybody analyze us, we're sunk. I've given you plenty latitude, Ford, because you've delivered the goods. But *music*—nix!"

A bottle of rub-down liniment fell from a shelf. It almost crowned the King of Comedy. "Hey, Abdul!" he shouted. "What in hell? You're gettin' awful clumsy."

"I did not knock her down, Mr. Sennett," said Abdul. "She just drop. Boom!"

Mr. Sterling was sulking now. "So you won't give me some violinists, eh?"

"What does Lehrman say?"

"He says, 'Nuts.' "

At this moment the whole building began to shake. "It's an earthquake!" said Mack. He leaped from the table. Sterling already was hopping down the steps. Abdul and Sennett, both stark naked, were coming after him, shouting: "Earthquake!"

Abdul was anxious to have his master retract earlier accusations. "See? I didn't knock the bottle or hit against the table, hey? We have the earthquake like this in Turkey once."

"The hell with Turkey!" said Mack, running toward Allesandro street. Many excited citizens were already in that thoroughfare. The appearance among them of two nude heavyweights was a bizarre sensation. The salt coating on Mack's torso gave him a Lot's wife veneer which caused

comment. *What* kind of immoral pictures were they taking on the Keystone lot?

Ford Sterling had beaten Mack and Abdul to the street. "For God's sake, Ford," Mack said, "lend me your coat for an apron."

"Do I get an orchestra for the picture?"

"I'll give you Sousa hisself. Hand me your coat before I get pinched."

"Will it be a five-piece orchestra?"

"Yes. A brass band, if you give me the coat."

"Can I make the picture all by myself? No director?"

"Do I get that coat or don't I?"

"Promise? An orchestra and some privacy?"

"I'll promise anything."

Sterling took off his coat and Mack hastily put it over his salted loins. "Tie the sleeves in back. And give Abdul your shirt. Here comes a cop."

The ground was giving forth a rumbling sound. A second shock had set in. "I'll give Abdul my shirt," Sterling said, "if you'll agree to put a canvas screen around the stage when I start the picture."

"Okay," said Mack. "Where's your modesty, Abdul, standing there like that?"

"It happens lots of time in Turkey," said Abdul.

After the earth had finished its tango, Mack, Abdul and Sterling returned to the Tower. "I only hope nothing happened to my plumbing," Mack said. He found his tub un-

harmful and said to Abdul: "Get me my pants and sweep up them busted bottles."

To Ford he said: "Maybe you've got an idea in this music thing. I dunno. We'll try it."

"It'll revolutionize comedy," said Ford.

Sennett gave Sterling a camera man and a stage to himself. He surrounded it with high canvas walls. He hired an orchestra at \$100 a day. Sterling would not permit the orchestra inside the enclosure, but seated them the other side of the canvas partition. He gave directions through the cloth barrier.

For four days Sennett heard the orchestra playing nothing but "Hearts and Flowers." Sterling had put up a muslin ceiling so that Sennett, for once, could not see inside the set from the Tower. In desperation, Sennett went down and called through the canvas wall: "Hey, Sterling, can't you change that damn 'Hearts and Flowers' tune to something else?"

"Where's your sense of honor?" said Ford. "You promised not to butt in."

"Well, can't they play 'When You and I Were Young, Maggie'? Or something just as good? It's driving everybody nuts."

"Go 'way," said Sterling.

Mack bore with the orchestra another day. Sterling was supposed to be making a picture called *Follow in Father's Footsteps*. The story concerned a proud sire who sought to



buy off a vixen after she had ensnared his son. Finally, Mack could stand the "Hearts and Flowers" theme no longer. He went down to the Sterling stage, sneaked to the side opposite that of the musicians, brought out a jack-knife and cut a slit in the canvas. He peeked inside and was amazed to see Sterling weaving up and down before the camera. The comedian made slow, hypnotic passes and recited in a Warfieldian voice :

"My son, my son. What have you done? You son of a gun!"

He looked very sad as he recited what may or may not have been his own poetic version of *Follow in Father's Footsteps*. Mack slipped away from the wall, unseen and very much mystified. As he retired to the Tower, the orchestra suddenly changed its monotonous tune to "Auld Lang Syne."

"That's funny," Sennett thought. "Why didn't they play that before?"

Then the music stopped altogether. Half an hour later Sterling appeared at the Tower. He was jubilant.

"Wait till you see the picture!" he said to Mack. "It's my masterpiece."

Mack had known so many fantastic consummations in pictures that he thought Sterling perhaps had stumbled on something new. When the film was ready, Mack and several others saw it in the projection room. It was an astounding work. There was no continuity to it at all. Just a lot of glid-

ing, sinuous movements by Sterling—Narcissus on the rampage, with the camera for his pool. He danced majestically and with forlorn grandeur. His mouth was seen in continuous action, like a ghost making an unheard oration.

"Scrap the film," said Mack sadly. "It's *too* revolutionary."

"Didn't you get anything out of it?" asked Sterling.

"Something very valuable," said Mack. "I'll demonstrate it in our next picture."

The idea which Mack had obtained from this failure was that of "slow motion." It was now possible for Sennett's daring young men to float through the air with the greatest of ease. The prosaic world could be halted for a moment in the circumambient ether, while a brickbat flattened it to the master's comical will.

Sennett employed his "slow motion" gags in connection with several bathing beauty pictures. He originated and developed many other photographic illusions; but long after they are forgotten, Sennett's contribution to seaside styles will be the achievement emphasized by historians.

If the ladies who unveil nineteen-twentieths of their bodies at our beaches knew that Mack Sennett was their deliverer from heavy raiment, they would rear statues to him at Atlantic City, Miami and other summer capitals. In fairness, we must agree that Jack Curley, the sports promoter, originated the one-piece bathing suit while on tour with Annette

Kellerman, Neptune's favorite daughter. But we must be equally just to Mack, and credit him with introduction of the *one-half-piece* bathing suit.

In the era of which we write, a world war had not arrived to throttle the pruderies which were the legacy of the gay nineties. Bathing suits were almost as long as Mother Hubbards. They were dark and sombre bundles, had half-sleeves, full skirts and assuredly were designed to encourage drowning rather than passion. Long stockings, slippers, and bathing caps as big as ostrich nests completed the ensemble. Brows were not plucked and hair was unbobbed and wind-blown. Women had a perpetually weird look, somewhere between amazement and resignation.

Mack's abbreviations were always an inch or two shorter than the prevailing bathing styles, but he had no idea at the time that he was becoming the Patou of the sands. Nor did he realize that his pictures, seen by millions of women, were in effect an emancipation proclamation. He simply was giving his audiences what they wanted. And he did more in a few years to free the women of America from their horse-blanket pagodas than had any other man or woman in centuries of editorializing.

His bathing suits were always in excellent taste, daring but never vulgar. That he faced great censorial danger in becoming the Schiaparelli of the seaside seems absurd to us now, but it was a real enough risk in the pioneer days.

One must remember that no "good" woman smoked a

cigarette in public in that lamentable era. A title from Lubin's, *Her Secret*, indicates the domestic turmoil of a lady who was a covert cigarette smoker:

"Jack, I will be equally frank with you. When we were married, I thought my little vice would shock you. You had placed me, unwillingly, upon such a dazzling pedestal. Perhaps I was wrong, but I concealed the little puffs from you, and you, silly boy, suspected a conflagration."

The Keystone girls had an effective way of selling themselves to Mack as bathing beauties. They would come to the Tower, swathed in bathrobes, suddenly unveil, saying:

"How do you like *this*, Mr. Sennett?"

The Lucien LeLong of the surf would bubble, come to a boil, his eyes pop out while these angels stood with outspread wings. Then he would say:

"That's a little too daring," or, "Maybe we should put some more material on the hips."

It was in this Tower that American butterflies were released from their woolen cocoons. Come, now, Bishop Stunon, hasn't the world been a happier place?



## *Chapter 15*

### A ROCKING-CHAIR ADMIRAL

**A**FTER Mack had finished his morning ablutions, enjoyed a rub-down and concluded several horizontal conferences, he would stand at a window and look down on the Allesandro street entrance to his plant. There was a sprawling wooden arch above a gate which swung wide each day to let in his car (he had a big second-hand Packard now), and on the arch, in tremendous lettering, was the sign :

#### MACK SENNETT COMEDIES

It was his hallmark of success. He jingled some twenty-dollar gold pieces as he gloated over his sign, then put on his hat to start on a grand tour of the several stages. He now had as many as six companies working simultaneously.

The Sennett hat was an expensive Panama; nevertheless he had taken scissors and cut away the top of the crown! This was to let the sunlight play upon his luxuriant hair. He said that ventilation made one's scalp healthy and prevented baldness. Mack's method was the forerunner of the hatless Hollywood era.

After his tour of the stages and pow-wows with directors, Mack would go to the stucco projection room to see rough-drafts of his comedies. There were three rows of benches in this dim chamber, like the pews of a backwoods church. Mack had a large rocking-chair for himself and sat, one leg tucked under him, like a half-Buddha. He clasped his hands over his belly and analyzed his product. A shallow box, filled with sawdust, was within range of Mack's tobacco-shots. He kept his crownless hat on while he rocked. If impatient, he unfolded his big hands, brought the gold pieces from his pocket and played with them. His subordinates did not relish the clinking of gold pieces—it signified a royal criticism.

Mack talked sparingly in the projection room. His lieutenants listened intently for every meaningful noise that might come through the dark stillness. If the King were in a good humor, the rocking-chair creaked at a slow, even tempo. If it didn't creak at all, it meant that his attention was drawn to some flaw in a scene. If the chair set up a furious, crunching rasp, someone was about to be reprimanded. But the Sennett laughter—or lack of it—was the infallible test of a comedy's value.

When a gag failed to make Mack laugh, the men automatically decided to eliminate it or re-shoot that bit of business. If he *did* laugh, they made a note of that, too, for when Mack Sennett laughed, they knew that ten million Americans would howl, and at the same place in the story where Sennett had laughed. He was the Abraham Lincoln of comedy, by, for and of the people—his taste was the most infallible audience-barometer in the history of motion-picture burlesque. He *never* missed.

He did not have a sense of humor in the accepted interpretation of the phrase. He had a combination of fundamental qualities that gave the appearance of ominous wisdom. Perhaps he had the greatest sense of the ridiculous of any man in modern times.

Beneath the odd and fantastic didoes of this brooding keeper of the clowns and despite his suspicious moods, his penchant for baths, for champagne with corned beef and raw onions, the truncated Panama hat, his ponderous but intense love for Mabel Normand, his literary shortcomings and educational poverty, his liberality with temperamental people on the one hand and unyielding, taskmasterlike behavior on the other—beneath these evidences of muddled majesty, one feels, rather than sees, evidences of a compelling simplicity of purpose, a tenacious, strong, driving power that made him the Napoleon of the cap and bells. In his almost primitive soul there existed the average man's instinctive dread of destiny and innate yearning for revolt.



He created for himself and for the millions of the earth-bound a voodoo heaven of violent laughter. He provided a means of emotional escape as raucous as a prison-break.

His high priests of pantomime caricatured earth's hourly problems, injustices and defeats in a manner that seemed peculiarly real in the midst of the unreality of the action. The tyrannies of smug dignity fell beneath Sennett's slap-stick blows. Authority, symbolized by his ubiquitous cops, was forever being bludgeoned by the meek and the oppressed—and the world laughed.

Gilbert Seldes's critique contains this excellent analysis :

"Keystone comedies are predicament, life's little ironies translated into grotesques and projected in a ceaseless flow of movement. The population of the Keystone world consists of scamps, scoundrels, shysters, fakers, tramps—outcasts, in short order—with policemen and pretty girls as foils to their activity; a little later, the poor and oppressed waiters and barbers and show-girls appear; but the successful, well-groomed, alert and smart American never appears."

The Keystone lot was expanded to include twenty-eight acres, including a hill on which were to be seen, as Mr. Keats exclaimed, "What maidens loth! What mad pursuit!" Clusters of new buildings grew up about the old shacks and shanties. Architecturally the Edendale colony had begun with little, and the more structures added to the scene, the greater the air of hopeless confusion.

Mack was pleased with his environment, with his Tower and the coffin-like cutting and projection room. He permitted no ladies in the cutting room. He had discovered a disquieting flirtation in progress there one day. He liked to sit in masculine solitude, rocking and chewing his cuddy, the sawdust-box within range. Keystone pictures were his life. The architectural shortcomings of the plant worried him not at all.

Contrast this environment with the Alhambra throne-rooms of certain present-day picture executives. I am thinking of one whose offices look like the offspring of a morganatic marriage between the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles and the gentlemen's rest room at the Mills Hotel.

A man, of course, need not do business in a pig sty to be successful or worthy of honors, but so often do we find in Hollywood's daffy Taj Mahals posturing gentlemen, whose ambassadorial hides, when scratched, reveal the churl, the witling or the prig. Olympian Hollywood, with its anemic Joves and its court of yea-saying demigods—the world's backyard of artistic confusion!

Sennett had a fierce and sensitive pride that occasionally revealed itself, despite his boiler-maker's bulk and his stoical exercise of self-control. He did not like to be argued with or contradicted (who does?). He might be swayed if his subjects made the process painless and indirect. One could

not predict just how he might respond to an outright criticism or a display of insurgent speech.

One day he asked his secretary, Walter Klinger: "How do you like me best? With or without a drink?"

Mr. Klinger had had an exceptionally busy and wearisome afternoon. "I'm going to tell you the truth. When you have a few under your belt, you're a prince. When you're stone sober, you're the most annoying slave-driver in the world."

Mr. Sennett straightway went to his cupboard and poured himself a drink. "It *does* make me feel more human, at that."

One of his favorite ways of answering an unwelcome argument was to ask his critic to rise and look out the Tower window. Then, Mack would point down to the big arch over the gate and ask:

"Is *your* name on any buildings or gates?"

Mack allowed practical jokes; in fact, he encouraged them, unless they were on him. Once at a beach house party at Santa Monica, and on a signal by the prankish host, the guests teamed up, threw Sennett to the floor and filled his trousers with sand. He did not speak to any of these gentlemen for months afterward.

Mack always entered through the big gate, whether he arrived in his car or on foot. He liked to pass under the arch that bore his name so ostentatiously. The watchman swung the gate wide for the King, when he arrived in the morning

and when he departed at night. Other members of the troupe used a small gate which led to an alley-way between Mabel Normand's dressing room and the projection room.

One day Slim Summerville and Bobby Dunn decided to play a rather messy joke on Actor Neil Hamilton, the most dignified and best-dressed performer of the Sennett forces. Summerville filled a bucket with stale beer and other things and stood guard behind a coping on Mabel's roof. Dunn was to act as the lookout man. When Hamilton arrived, the signal was to be a cough. Then Summerville would let the well-groomed artist have the burden of the pail.

Dunn lurked in the alley-way and saw Hamilton arrive. The marked man was with Sennett! Mack, contrary to custom, started for the small gate, arm-in-arm with Hamilton. At this moment a friend of Mr. Hamilton called from the street. Hamilton excused himself and Mr. Sennett continued on through the gate. Dunn ran to warn Summerville. At this unfortunate moment, Mr. Sennett *coughed*. Summerville answered the signal with a rousing deluge from the bucket. It was a good job. Sennett looked as though he had just finished a forced march through the sewers of Paris.

Many persons had witnessed this horrendous affront to the King's person. And one and all began to run as though for their jobs. When Sennett cleared his eyes of liquid débris, and saw dimly the many winged comedians, he could not be sure who had perpetrated the outrage. He staggered

to his office, mad as a wet lion, and did not know for years who had emptied the brimming pail.

Sennett once had been absent in New York on business. The Keystone gateman fell ill and a substitute took his place. When the comedians learned that Mack was due to return, they went into hiding and pretended that no work was being done.

Mack drove up to the gate, and was amazed to find no sign of life on the lot. "Well," he said to the new watchman, "why don't you open the gate?"

"Who are you?" asked the watchman.

"I'm Mack Sennett."

The watchman shook his head. "That's what they all say. You can't get by with that."

The tramp comedian, Joe Jackson, had a passion for electrical jokes. He wired Del Henderson's automobile so that Del got a shock, no matter what part of the car he touched.

One day Jackson was expecting Sennett on the set. He wired a chair so that anyone who sat in it would receive a terrific electrical jolt. He waited until Sennett appeared, then ushered him to the chair. After the King of Comedy had sat down, Jackson turned on the juice.

It must have been an excruciating experience, but Sennett never batted an eye. He sat there for half a minute, then rose, yawned, and went away. Jackson was of the belief

that the electricity had not been turned on and was about to test his device when a big carpenter appeared on the set. He had an axe. He went directly to the wired chair and solemnly began to demolish it.

At another time, Jackson told Sennett he had a picture that would "knock the spectators out of their seats."

"I've already seen parts of it in the projection room," said Sennett. "I don't think it will make history."

"Will you look at the whole thing tonight?" asked Jackson. "Fill up the projection room, and if it don't knock 'em off their seats, I'll work the rest of my contract for nothing."

"It's a go," said Sennett.

Mack sat in his rocking-chair to view the Jackson picture. All three rows of benches were filled to capacity. At the first bit of business, Sennett did not laugh, but the entire first row of spectators let out a howl. Presently the second row gave a similar demonstration. Sennett wondered *what* they were yelling at. The picture so far had seemed dull and pointless to him. Just then the denizens of the third row began to shriek. This show of emotion was a mystery to Sennett until he felt a fiery current running through his hips. With unimpaired dignity he arose and addressed Jackson in the darkness:

"Joe, this picture has less juice than your batteries."

Jackson was fond of peanuts, and, when anyone asked for some, would point to his pocket and say: "Help yourself!" Jackson usually carried garter snakes in that pocket.

Although it became increasingly hard to reach Sennett in his ivory tower, he sometimes relaxed and listened to complaints, petitions and crack-pot ideas by the lesser lights of the studio. Once a man or woman did manage to get past Abdul, Sennett listened patiently to the supplicant's woes.

Young as he still was, he had a sort of patriarchal manner during private audiences. Perhaps these occasional talks about matters not entirely of a professional nature gave him a short recess from prodigious labors. He had his own worrisome problems and griefs, but hid them successfully while listening to the groans of others.

One day when a bathing beauty applied to him for domestic advice, Mack had just received a telegram telling of his father's death in Canada. Also, he had just heard that D. W. Griffith, in a purported interview, had said he was taking charge of Keystone production (a report repudiated by Griffith after Mack had issued a blistering denial). Too, he was up to his ears in a fight to keep pirates from stealing his gags.

Nevertheless, Sennett sat calmly while the young lady told him she was going to divorce her husband. She had been a bonbon dipper in a candy factory before a molecule of fame had come to her, via a Sennett bathing suit.

"I didn't know you were married," said Mack.

The young lady walked up and down the floor with a Ziegfeldian sway. "We got married before I made good. He's just a punk of a kid."

"Has he been unfaithful?" asked Mack.

"Hell, no! It's just the other way around."

"Does he beat you or bawl you out?"

The lass sniggered. "I'd like to *see* him!"

"Is he lazy?"

"No, he's an elevator pilot downtown."

"Ugly?"

"Not specially, but he ain't *my* type."

"Then why do you want a divorce?"

She grew confidential. "I got a career now, and he's just an ordinary kid from Utah. He can't see how our lives had growed apart. That I'm different."

"What makes you think you're different?" asked Mack.

She flounced pertly. "I'm s'prised you ask me that, Mr. Sennett? You ought to know a star can't settle down just to fry eggs and have babies."

Mack looked out the window for a while. Then he said: "In the first place, you're not a star. In the second, you've got a big head, which means you'll never be a star. In the third, fried eggs and babies make the world go 'round, which means if you don't want 'em you don't deserve to be a star. Who's your sweetie?"

Amazed by his deductive powers, the lass gulped and admitted: "I'm in love with a big newspaper editor who understands me."

"He sounds brilliant," said Sennett. "Well, it's your do. But if you had half a brain, you'd go home and be darned



glad some kid loves you, because some day you'll wish to the Lord you had somebody to fry eggs for."

"This editor is a prince," said the young lady. "He thinks I got talent."

"Yeah," said Mack. "I know what he thinks you got."

Two weeks after the young lady had obtained a divorce, she came screaming onto a stage where Sennett was conferring with his aides. "What's wrong with you now, sister?" asked Sennett.

"The rat!" she said. "The rat!"

"Who, the newspaper editor?"

"No. Did you hear what my ex-husband went and did?"

"I don't keep up with society," said Mack.

"He never told me about his uncle. The cheat! His uncle died and left him a million dollars!"

Mack jingled his gold pieces. "That's what I call underhanded."

## *Chapter 16*

### WHEN THE PIE WAS OPENED

THE world boasts three everlasting types of men distinguished for their unlimited garrulity. Each of these loquacious groups has its predominant topic of conversation. One coterie, the old soldiers, talk ceaselessly of their battles. A second group, the old roués, speak of scintillant belles of yesteryear; and a third, the old college graduates, descant endlessly on their ancient football heroes.

Of the three reminiscent fraternities, the old grads are loudest and longest in dissertation. In America, entire reunion-weeks are spent in arguments about former stars of the gridiron—Thorpe of Carlisle, Brickley of Harvard, Coy of Yale, Heston of Michigan, Oliphant of Army, Eckersall of Chicago or Grange of Illinois. Who was the best

at doing what? Which one excelled in every department of the game?

If the motion-picture industry had an alumni association, the subject of prodigious custard-pie throwers naturally would arise. Many illustrious names would roll off the tongues of these old grads. There was Ben Turpin, a masterful pie-carrier and an elusive chocolate-eclair strategist. Charlie Chaplin unquestionably ranks high among the forward passers of the dough-skin. He excelled at diagnosing the pastry-play and was dazzling as a defensive quarter-bake. Ford Sterling was a great crust-gainer and perpetrator of lap-dissolve tarts. Ferocious W. C. Fields was an iron man at right guard and took the pie in his stride—and also in his face, which was a “natural” for bucking-the-pie. Buster Keaton was a phenomenal on-side pie-kicker. The great tackle Wallace (“Pie Face”) Beery, once saved the game for Custard College by a black-berry cobbler drop kick with the score tied and ten seconds before the fade out.

But all these pie-tossers were mere *petits fours* twiddlers when compared with that greatest custard slinger of all time, the mightiest triple-threat man that ever stepped on the waffle-iron, the All-American of All-Americans, the supreme grand lama of the meringue, the Hercules of the wingèd dessert, the Ajax of the hurtling fritter, the paragon of patty-casters, the unconquerable and valiant flinger of open and closed mince models, the monarch of the zooming rissoles. . . .

Roscoe ("Fatty") Arbuckle!

There was a full-bake for any team! He had all the qualifications that a champion must possess: form, speed, power, co-ordination, temperament and an ability to take as well as give pastry. When Fatty threw a pie, it stayed thrown. He had the control of a major-league pitcher and loved his work.

Although he weighed 320 pounds, in season, Roscoe was as nimble as a trout. His so-called fat was mostly muscle. His success at first was attributed to beginner's luck, but after he had thrown some ten tons of messy delicacies without a wild pitch, he was placed on the varsity team to stay. He often was suspected of professionalism, but refuted the charge with proof that he was working his way through the cook book.

Sceptics who arbitrarily state that pie-throwing requires neither intelligence, strength nor courage don't know what they are talking about. They are of the same stripe as those decadent critics who ignorantly pass over all matters beyond their comprehension, such as, say, the honeymoon of the praying mantis.

"The praying mantis doesn't suffer at all," I've heard them say. "He doesn't know what it's all about."

The hell he doesn't! Who are these idiots-savants to decry the solemn struggle of the male mantis, as he is being devoured by his mate, and at a moment when life seems to hold some meaning after all? Professor Ecupep of Norom

University should hang his head in shame for having published a smug brochure belittling the death-ecstasy of the *mantis religiosa*. (A letter should be written to the *Times*.)

Drunk or sober, Fatty Arbuckle could deliver a bake-oven grenade from any angle, sitting, crouching, lying down with a good book, standing on one leg or hanging by his toes from a pergola. He was ambidexterous and could hurl two pies at once in opposite directions.

After his ex-communication as a Thespian, due to a moral public's mistaken belief in his guilt in causing the bath-tub death of Virginia Rappe at a San Francisco hotel, Arbuckle was like a bee out of honey. He used to sit on the side-lines and watch other candidates for the team. And, tolerant though he was, by nature and from adversity, it hurt him to see new athletes throw their pies so listlessly and without art. You can't just chuck a pie, willy-nilly, as though it were a Noel Coward epigram.

But there are moments of optimism even in the condemned man's cell, and Fatty's heart was glad when comedy producers called upon him to coach the pie-throwers. Luckily the censors and purists were temporarily unaware that Arbuckle was permitted to make a living in this manner. They did not know that for almost a year the pies were tainted.

The big fellow got a vicarious thrill out of his duties as a Knute Rockne of the Custards. He did much to keep alive the old traditions and showed his charges the correct stance, how to time their throws and how to attain a follow-through

movement. As in golf, a man must keep his eye on the pie. As in baseball, you must play the pie; don't let the pie play you. As in boxing, you must lead with the pie.

And, although barred from active service, Arbuckle still was the master pie-thrower. Like Casanova, in another and older branch of sport, he never lost his knack.

He had been a mountain of good nature, but when the snoopers kept hounding him, taking away his bread as well as his reputation, he began to wish that he had been born a mule, the better to carry the heaviest burden life can know, a broken heart.

Roscoe Arbuckle was born at Smith Center, Kansas, in 1887. He moved with his parents to California, became a scene-shifter at the Pike Theater, Long Beach, then went into vaudeville as a black-face monologist. His burnt cork début was at the Pantages' Theater in Seattle.

Afterward he sang tenor in a tabloid musical comedy unit which toured Canada and Western United States. He fell in love with a prima donna, Araminta Durfee, and married her on the stage of a rustic theater at Long Beach. They ran out of money on their wedding trip to the Orient, principally because Arbuckle ate three steaks at a sitting. Fortunately they had a round-trip ticket and came back to California to seek work.

Mack Sennett hired Arbuckle as an extra at \$5 a day.

When he brought this fortune home, Minta said: "I don't believe you earned it. You must have won it at craps."

The remembrance of musical days never left Sennett, and when he learned that Minta had been a prima donna, he hired her at once. He also paid her the unusual honor of permitting her to come occasionally into the projection room to view the "rushes."

"She knows entertainment," said Sennett. "She's a prima donna."

When Fred Mace died, Sennett looked for a fat star to team with Ford Sterling. He promoted Arbuckle to that station. Fatty appeared in forty-seven comedies the first year. He directed forty others during his four years with Keystone.

The Arbuckles were the first married couple to work for Mack. He liked to take them on pleasure trips. In 1914 he invited them to accompany him to San Francisco, there to see the first pre-view in the history of motion pictures.

This event was the inspirational child of Sid Grauman, bouncing manager of the Imperial Theater in Market Street. Mr. Grauman now is Hollywood's foremost concocter of stage prologues and film premières. He was for a brief time a member of a commission appointed to beautify Los Angeles. He resigned in a pet when the City Fathers asked him to submit a plan for interior decoration of a public comfort station.

The San Francisco pre-view was the first edition of Jack London's *Sea Wolf*, with Hobart Bosworth. Jack London, Grauman, Jesse Lasky and Grauman's father had been pals in Alaska during the gold-rush. London had been press-agent for a theatrical benefit at Dawson in 1898, an enterprise sponsored by the Graumans.

An audience of newspaper men, motion-picture executives, stars and writers attended the pre-view. At the close of the performance there were speeches, and the cry of "Author! Author!" resounded for the first time in a motion-picture theater.

Mr. London slumped in his seat, overcome with embarrassment. He had been brave in other situations. He had defied many Alaskan blizzards and, recklessly enough, was one of the first men to wear a wrist-watch. But now a great panic possessed him.

The clamor increased. Finally, Mr. London got to his feet. His face was red and he clutched at a neighbor's chair to keep from falling in the aisle. He made his speech, which was:

"Ladies and gentlemen . . ." He hesitated and swayed. "All I can *just* say is: 'Thank you,' and now I'll buy a drink."

There was great applause, partly for the speech and partly for the invitation. The pre-viewers went to the nearest saloon, Mr. London in the lead. There he felt more re-



laxed and told stories with an eloquence that belied his earlier confusion.

It will be remembered that Tom Ince owned ten per cent of the Keystone stock; so he was glad to do professional favors for Sennett.

Whenever Ince had a big picture in progress, he would telephone the news to Mack. "Tuesday I'm going to have five hundred soldiers," or, "We're going to do 'Bull Run' with a lot of cannon," or "Wednesday we are having three hundred Indians and two hundred cowboys."

Mack would concoct a story suitable to the background of the Ince super-special, take his comedians to Santa Monica, stop the dramatic director and shoot scenes with his clowns in front of the Ince actors. These "spectacles" enhanced Sennett's reputation. His competitors could not afford such grand-scale efforts.

During one of the "borrowed background" episodes, Sennett put Fatty Arbuckle before an army of Ince soldiers. Mack had interrupted the "Spanish War" at ten o'clock in the morning. The important part of Ince's scene depended upon the discovery by the warriors of an almost-dead baby. The Ince battalions were grouped about this "dying" child when Sennett and his comedians drove up to the camp.

"I think a baby would go great in comedy," Sennett told Ince.

"Go ahead and shoot," said Tom, "but be as quiet as pos-

sible. We had a hell of a time getting that kid to sleep."

The baby slept through most of the sequence, but when the big chase occurred, General Fatty Arbuckle tripped on his sabre. He crashed to the ground and upset so many props that the baby began to howl. After the comedians had gone, it took Ince's men four expensive hours to restore the child to slumber.

During one of his friendly raids on Ince's canyon, Sennett bumped into a huge character actor who wore a lush false beard.

"That's a lulu of a muff," said Sennett. "What's your name?"

"Nick Cogley. I used to work for Selig."

"If you'd come work for me, I might make a comedian out of you."

By Sennett's alchemy Cogley was transformed from a Protean character actor into a custard-pie-target comedian.

Always on the lookout for "backgrounds," Sennett heard of a forthcoming celebration, Juanipero Sierra, at San Diego. He took the Arbuckles, Nick Cogley and his favorite director, Dick Jones, to the festival.

There was a big parade. Sennett began the first scene in the lobby of the U. S. Grant Hotel. Minta Arbuckle acted the part of Cogley's wife. Cogley was supposed to be very jealous of Arbuckle and chased him to the street, a story device intended to project the comedians into the parade.

The actors ran back and forth along the line of march, over and under everything. From the moment they started the first scene, Cogley had a feeling of utmost dread. He could not explain it. This premonition affected his work, and, after the picture had been made, Sennett asked him:

"What the hell was wrong with you today? You didn't have much pep."

"I don't know," said Cogley. "I just had a funny feeling."

They returned to Edendale that night. The next morning Sennett notified big Cogley that he was to work with Arbuckle at Venice, the Coney Island of Los Angeles. Nick had another "funny feeling," but suppressed it so as not to worry George Nichols, who was directing his maiden picture.

The troupe reached Venice at one o'clock in the afternoon. Their first location was in front of the Thompson roller-coaster. They began a chase around the Mecca Bar. Arbuckle dashed out of the bar. Cogley ran to the foreground to fire a shot. As Cogley charged into the foreground, Director Nichols called out:

"Stop, Nick! Stop!"

The two hundred and fifty-pound comedian pivoted. His weight was too much for his right leg. His shin bone gave way. As he fell, Nichols called out:

"Come on, Nick. Get up."

"I can't get up. It's busted."

Arbuckle lifted Cogley to a chair and Nichols took hold of his leg. "Yes," he said, "it's broken. Look how the foot

dangles." Arbuckle called a doctor. An ambulance took Cogley to an emergency hospital.

The doctor put a silver bar and twelve screws in Cogley's leg.

Cogley was through as a comedian, but as soon as he could get about on crutches began to work as a director. He was "tipped off" that a director, to make good with Sennett, had to be hard-boiled.

"I'll be hard-boiled," said Cogley, "as soon as I get off these crutches."

Sennett one day came into the shack which the men used as a dressing room. Slim Summerville, Arbuckle, Sterling and others were present as Cogley greeted Mack with a cheery: "How do you do?"

Sennett looked at him and frowned. "Go to hell!"

After the King of Comedy had retired, Cogley said: "Now that was a fine way to answer me, wasn't it?"

Sennett now reappeared in the doorway and said to Cogley: "'How do you do,' don't mean anything. 'Go to hell,' means something."

One day while Cogley was napping, Mabel Normand stole his crutches and hid them. When Cogley awakened he was helpless.

"Where's my crutches, Mabel?" he said. "I got to go some place."

"Where do you have to go?" asked Mabel.

"It's a personal matter," said Cogley. "Give me my crutches or I'll break your neck."

Mabel pretended to relent. She said she would get the crutches. She was gone an hour. Cogley was furious. When Mabel returned, she said:

"I tried to get the crutches, but forgot where I hid them."

Some gentlemen friends had to assist Cogley to the place he wished to visit. They found his crutches that night behind an ice-box in the Keystone cashier's bungalow.

Cogley had trouble with his leg during all that year. Once he was in bed for several weeks. While he was lying there, Mabel and Director Walter Wright brought him some flowers. Mabel announced that they were half-way through a picture and wanted to use Cogley's house for a fire scene.

"Oh, no, you won't!" said the invalid. "You'll not use *this* house."

"Oh, yes, we will," said Mabel. "Did you bring the smoke pots, Walter?"

"Yes," said Walter, "we've got everything."

The tricksters set the smoke pots going until the air was thick and stifling. Cogley roared: "Open those windows, damn it! Give me some air."

"Give him some air," said Mabel.

The two fiends departed as smoke poured from the Cogley windows. They ran out of Cogley's door, yelling: "Fire!

Fire!" Thinking it was a genuine fire, neighbors turned in an alarm.

In the early days film piracies were so numerous that each company displayed its trade-mark in every scene. Sometimes a label would appear incongruously on a tree, a door or a wall. Sennett thought this an offensive intrusion by the commercial world. He would not permit such marks on his scenery; he claimed their presence destroyed the illusion.

Not only were some of his prints pirated and copied by freebooters, but his gags often were stolen. He thought there was a leak and decided to employ detectives. Furthermore, they would check up on the activities of his companies when he was not present.

One of these stool pigeons was retained to spy on a troupe which Fred Fishback was directing. There was to be a scene in which an automobile would run into a big tree. A charge of dynamite was to be detonated in the tree to coincide with the crash.

Fishback's assistant, Al McNeil, went on location to prepare the blast. The stool pigeon suspected McNeil of something nihilistic and followed him. McNeil placed a generator behind one tree, strung a wire across the road to the spot where the crash was scheduled to occur, then put a charge of dynamite in the tree which was to be rammed.

The stool pigeon couldn't figure out what was afoot. He

went to the first tree, where the generator was in place. McNeil meanwhile was inspecting his job at the powder magazine. The detective decided to see for himself what manner of gadget McNeil had installed. He began working the generator-pump up and down. This set off the powder across the road. There was a great roar and McNeil left the ground. He fell unconscious. His hands, face and scalp were singed. He was taken to the hospital. He couldn't see for nine days.

"We're going to have no more stool pigeons," said Mack, as he paid off his detectives. "They're too curious."

Director Cogley filmed the first automobile road race to be shown in a Keystone comedy. Jenkins, a camera man, set up his tripod between two fairly large trees. As the automobile racers came toward the camera, one of the machines blew a tire. The car headed straight for Jenkins, cut the two trees off as evenly as though they had been carefully hewn down, smashed Jenkins against a stump, and killed him. The tripod legs of the camera were cut off, but the film remained intact. The sequence was run as part of a comedy and no audience knew that the scene had been that of a real and fatal accident.

Cogley was an unfailing victim of Mabel Normand's practical jokes. Whenever she enraged the hard-boiled director,

she screamed and ran. He was unable to catch her, what with his faulty leg.

She always made up with him, however. He reluctantly forgave her. One night, when Cogley was about to leave the studio, Mabel came up to him. "Let's be friends, Nick."

"All right," he said, "but try to act more civilized."

She sat on his lap, kissed him and put her arms about his neck. She was in tears as she stroked his face and said: "Life is too beautiful and sweet to have people go on being enemies. We're true blue friends, aren't we, Nickie?"

He was deeply stirred. "I'm glad you've decided to settle down and behave yourself."

When Cogley got on the street car, the conductor and passengers began to laugh. A woman handed him a mirror from her bag. He looked in it to find one side of his face painted red and the other side black. Mabel, while stroking his face and sobbing, had had red grease paint concealed in one hand and black paint palmed in the other. She played this trick on Cogley three times in three weeks.

An itinerant camera man came to the studio one day to take post-card pictures. These were the first fan photographs. Cogley refused to give the man an order.

Everyone else but Cogley began to receive these post-cards with requests for autographs. He said he felt slighted at getting no fan mail. Then, one morning, he came in to find a stack of letters a foot high on his desk. He began to open



his mail curiously. There were pamphlets from all manner of specialists whose literature warned that: "Delay is Dangerous," and "Why don't you write?" and claimed to cure every known disease.

Mabel Normand had diligently answered patent-medicine advertisements and signed Cogley's name. He received intimate literature, the bulk of which recommended remedies for feminine ills, at intervals for three years.

One day an extremely hammy type of actor applied for a job and Mabel said: "Let's frame this guy."

There was a wide stairway used by the Keystoneers in many pictures. Mabel brought in the applicant and introduced Hughey Fay to him as "Mr. Sennett." The ham was delighted.

"We'll give you a test right off," said the bogus Mr. Sennett.

Mabel summoned everyone to the staircase set. They responded, armed with breakaway bottles, plaster urns, slats, felt bricks and other Keystone paraphernalia. A camera was set up. The counterfeit Mr. Sennett told the actor to come down the stairs. The assembled cast began to shower him with vases, jugs, mirrors and other brittle props.

Sennett heard the horrible uproar and came to investigate. By the time he reached the scene, the wags had vanished. The actor was alone among the wreckage.

"What's all the rumpus about?" Mack asked the stranger.

The good man was groggy but very happy. "Why," he said, "Mr. Sennett has just given me a test for an engagement."

"That so?" said Mack. "Well, I am Mr. Sennett. You get the hell out of here!" He booted the ham off the stage and off the lot amid cries of the victim: "Wait till I tell Mr. Sennett! He'll discharge you."

The three things long identified with Keystone comedies were the chase, the bathing beauties and the custard pie. They were "staples."

The evolution of the custard pie was more or less accidental. The first deeds of motion-picture comedy violence were done with cudgels. Perhaps the term "slap-stick" referred to Harlequin's wooden sword. Sennett used bats and slats, and then tried mallets. It was not particularly funny if a man was crowned with a small hammer, but if a mace with a head as big as a churn were used, then it *was* funny. Sennett employed gigantic mallets.

After the big-mallet gag palled on the audiences, Sennett introduced bricks. These were made of felt, but looked like real bricks. Once the audience learned that they were felt dornicks, that gag also languished. Sennett thereupon introduced the "breakaway" bottle, made of a thin layer of resin. These bottles seemed very, very funny until the customers heard that they were not made of glass and were harmless. Sennett now created the breakaway vase and other fragile

*objets d'art*. These were made of plaster-of-Paris, thinly moulded. When all these bludgeons and breakaways had been worked to the limit, the Keystoneers were in need of some new weapon. One day when a scene in a bakery was being enacted, Ford Sterling picked up a pie. He hurled it, and the audience-reaction was enormous. The vogue for pies lasted for years, reaching its height when Arbuckle was in his comic heyday.

Although the first pies were custard, blackberry or blueberry pies were preferred. The darkly filled pies photographed more plainly than the custards or meringues. Also, when flies gathered on custard, they showed up clearly on the screen and served to nauseate fastidious movie patrons.

In view of the many stars who were graduated from Custard College, it seems odd that none of them received much acclaim in the press until as late as 1915.

In 1913, Eugene V. Brewster's pioneer fan magazine, the *Motion Picture Mirror*, conducted a nation-wide popularity contest. Seven million motion-picture fans voted. The winner was a young player named Romaine Fielding, a Lubin actor, who wore a rakish Panama hat, with the sweat-band showing, and a high collar. In this contest Mary Pickford was twenty-fifth, and Wallace Reid stood thirtieth! There were no Keystone players represented at all on this list, although the custard throwers of yesterday are among the ones remembered best of all movie pioneers.

## *Chapter 17*

### **FE, FI, FO, FUM!**

**F**ORD STERLING, chief of the Keystone Cops, received a salary of \$200 a week—a large salary for any police chief, real or make-believe.

His contract, in the summer of 1913, committed him to a final six months' service under the Sennett management. Rumor persisted that he was seeking employment elsewhere. He was admittedly the screen's premier comedian. Perhaps he might even form a company of his own, himself the undisputed star. Broncho Billy Anderson of Essanay had done as much—and Anderson had become a millionaire.

When these disquieting reports reached Sennett, he sought in every way to pamper his police chief. He sent him a case of Budweiser and ordered a brand-new uniform, custom-

built and embellished with gold epaulets and chevrons. He also tried to propitiate his fractious star with a new cap, subduing the temptation to keep it for himself.

The hint of Sterling's apostasy had grown into the proportions of a haunting threat. Even Pathé Lehrman began to look like a studio Cassius. Sennett was seeing daggers under every toga. Evidence was accumulating that his two pro-consuls might even go so far as to found a company of their own.

Mack summoned Lehrman. There was no preliminary examination.

"What's your grievance?"

"Well, if you must know, you're making a stooge out of me."

Sennett was disrobing for the bath. "In what way, my fine-feathered friend?"

"Every way. I'm getting no billing. I work day and night, and I'm not even a shadow to the public. Everything is 'Mack Sennett.' It's 'Mack Sennett this,' and 'Mack Sennett that.' "

The King of Comedy stepped into his bath and began to wet his chest. "Look here, you're going ham on me." He shook a sponge admonishingly. "And so is Sterling. You're making \$125 a week. That's not hay. As a matter of fact, that's half what I draw."

"Let's concede that point," said Lehrman. "But I hate to be an underpaid nobody."

"All right, Pathé. You can have a fifty-dollar raise. This

is no day to quarrel about money with an old pal. Now that that's off our chest, I want to tell you something. It's about Mabel."

"What's she up to now?"

Mack captured the soap and contemplated it dreamily. "Well, Pathé, we've been pals long enough for you to advise me. Do you think it would be bad business for Mabel and me to get married?"

Pathé appeared to be thinking. Sennett took his silence for encouragement. He went on: "Of course, I'm not telling you anything new. She was just a kid when we met. I've kind of fathered her since then. Now she's grown up, and she's a great balance wheel for me. What do you think?"

Pathé blurted out: "You may as well know the truth. Mabel and I are in love. Now you know."

Sennett sat up and stared hard at Pathé. "Take your jokes somewhere else."

Pathé was pale. "It's no joke. I meant to tell you before."

Sennett gripped the side of the tub. "How long's this been going on?"

"Since Tia Juana. It began down there."

Mack was dazed. "You and Mabel!" he said. "You and Mabel in love!"

Pathé started for the door. "I'm quitting."

"Just a minute," said Mack. "We'll talk about that some other time. On your way out, tell Sterling I want to see him."

The Chief of the Keystone Cops found Sennett on his

back, undergoing a Turkish version of a Swedish massage. Sterling was wearing the new gold-inlaid uniform and cap.

"Say, Ford, I've got some news for you. I called you here to offer you a new contract. A honey."

"How much money?"

"I've decided to raise you to \$750 a week. You're in a class by yourself now. It's unheard of. We'll sign up soon's Abdul gives me the alcohol finish."

Sterling's mouth gaped. Then he let out a great whoop and threw his new hat to the ceiling. It fell to the floor and lay there as he danced wildly.

Sennett beamed, forgetting for the moment about the cap, Pathé and Mabel. "I knew you'd be happy about it. Abdul, go open some Budweiser for Mr. Sterling."

"That confirms it!" Sterling yelled as he jumped up and down on the cap.

"It does me good to see you so happy," said Sennett paternally; "it's a hell of a big salary."

Sterling subdued himself long enough to say: "Mack, I always had a suspicion I was pretty good. Now I know it. If I'm worth \$750 to you, I ought to be worth at least that much to myself. I'm quitting and going into business on my own."

Sennett staggered under the blow. "Abdul," he said to his Turkish retainer, "never mind the Budweiser, and bring that hat here. After all, it's my property."

Sterling announced with finality: "Rule No. 1. There'll be no uniforms in my new company."

Two cataclysmic shocks in one day upset Mack's placidity. He tried to restore his dream world by dining with Mabel. After an hour of evasions, Mack suddenly asked her: "When do you and Lehrman intend to get married?"

She pretended neither surprise nor innocence. "I thought you'd ask me that. You've been behaving all evening as if you had something on your mind."

He braced himself. "So it's true? Suppose I object to this Austrian prince of yours?"

"You suppose lots of things. Suppose you quit supposing."

"I always thought me and you were going to get married."

"I always thought so too. My error."

Sennett beamed. "I'll have to get you something pretty nice for Christmas."

"A wedding ring would do. You can get one at almost any jeweler's."

Mack and Mabel were riding horse-back a few days after their emotional rapprochement. He was very glum and Mabel asked:

"Still sulking about Pathé Lehrman?"

"Sort of," said Sennett, "but in a different way than you



think. He and Sterling are going to quit, and it leaves me in a hole."

"Sterling's not the only comedian in the world."

"He's got the public, though, and it's a big blow to my pride to have him quit." He rode along in silence for several minutes, then said: "What's the use of kidding? I'm worried stiff. I lay awake last night thinking over this situation, then I had the funniest sort of hunch."

"About what?"

"Do you remember when we both were at Biograph, and I took you one night to the American Theater?"

"Sure. In Eighth Avenue. We took a bus ride up Riverside Drive."

"Do you remember the act that impressed us most?"

"Yes, it was pantomime, with a little fellow in a box, watching the show and pretending he was drunk."

"That's it. It was called *A Night in a London Club*.

Wasn't it *A Night in a London Music Hall*?"

I don't think so. I think it was *London Club*."

Sennett lapsed into a silence. Then: "Well, I've been trying to think of the name of that fellow in the box. I think it was Cunningham or Cantwell or something. I can't remember the darn name. Can you?"

"No," Mabel said, "I can't. But I remember the act was presented by Karno's Pantomime Company."

Mack was excited. "That's it. And it all comes back to me now. The manager was Alf Reeves. And the little comedian's

name was . . . damn it! I had it on the tip of my tongue. Damn it! It's gone. Was it Cameron? . . . Chadwick? . . . Something like Clifton? Well, I'll wire Kessel and have him get in touch with Reeves."

"You mean you're going to hire the little fellow whose name you remember so perfectly?"

"Mabel, if there's one thing I can do, it's to spot talent. Why I didn't think of this fellow before is beyond me. Maybe because Sterling, Arbuckle and the rest have gone ahead so fast. But this chap, what's-his-name, Carlson or Kincaid, has got something."

"He was funny," said Mabel. "There was something kind of sad about him. That's what I remember most. He was sad; he made your heart ache, but he was funny. Don't you remember I said: 'That guy was born with two strikes on him'? What was his name, anyway?"

Sennett telegraphed Kessel concerning the Karno act. He described in detail the man he wanted to hire. There was a delay, explained subsequently by the fact that the comedian Sennett had in mind had not been with the first company, which had played Hammerstein's, but with the second company which had played the American Theater. Kessel wired Sennett:

"FELLOW'S NAME CHARLIE CHAPLIN STOP HAS FORTY WEEKS' SOLID BOOKING STOP WON'T TAKE CHANCE WITH MOVIES."

Sennett urged Kessel to ascertain what Chaplin was earning on the stage, and to offer him three times his salary. Chaplin was being paid \$40 a week. Kessel promised him \$125 a week to sign with Keystone.

Chaplin consulted his company manager, Alf Reeves. The latter advised him to accept the terms of the Keystone contract. "It isn't likely you'd ever get that much on the stage," Reeves said.

Chaplin capitulated to the blandishments of Kessel. The pantomime troupe was playing Oil City, Pennsylvania. There Chaplin signed a contract in the late summer of 1913. He stipulated that he would join Keystone after his act had appeared at the Empress Theater, Los Angeles, the following November. He was none too sanguine about what the future held for him and none too confident of the survival chances of an adolescent industry.

Mack Sennett had serious misgivings when he called backstage at the Empress Theater that autumn. What was his new employe like? He had never seen him off-stage. It would be a calamity if he turned out to be past middle age. And what—My God—if he failed to photograph?

He was relieved to find Charlie Chaplin a young man in adequate health. The little comedian was then twenty-four years old. On the stage, with a desperate Desmond make-up, long drooping mustachios, a frock coat, checked vest and spats, Chaplin had seemed to be in the dissolute fifties, af-

flicted with drunkard's torpor and the genuine stigmata of St. Vitus's dance.

A heavy silence hung over the first meeting between the *ci-devant* boiler maker and the reticent music-hall alumnus. Sennett could not penetrate the diffidence of his recruit. Nor could Chaplin comprehend why the robust King of Comedy should be so inarticulate. They met in California, which automatically excluded the weather as a topic for conversational sanctuary. They appraised each other in silence. There was no spontaneous intimacy, no sudden and demonstrative affection between them. Afterwards, as then, Mack was "Mr. Sennett" to Charlie Chaplin.

When Chaplin did speak, his voice was soft and his accent revealed his British origin. Sennett learned something of his new employe's background. He was the son of a widowed mother and had spent a portion of his youth in the orphanage at Hanwell, North London.

What Sennett noticed particularly was the look of passive melancholia in Chaplin's eyes. The tragic mask was momentarily lifted by a most disarming smile. Sennett went away impressed by a man who must have known, despite his years, poverty, brutality and defeat. The King of Comedy did not verbalize this impression. What he actually said to himself was: "I hope we're not stuck with the little Limey."

Karno's vaudeville troupe moved on. Chaplin was left to sink or swim in strange and muddy waters. For a long time

an overwhelming timidity held him almost a prisoner in his hotel room. He knew that his contract with Sennett was iron-clad. Yet a gnawing uncertainty made him feel an alien among aliens. Each morning he would ride on the Edendale street car to the gates of the studio. He summoned the courage to get off the car. One look at the flamboyant sign over the main entrance was enough to make Chaplin turn back in panic. The sprawling plant, the noises that came from the stages, the clamor of the comedians—all these bewildered the little Englishman. Chaplin could not face such music! He shrank from the scene like the oft-rebuffed supernumerary, kicked and cuffed by arrogant matinee idols, snubbed even by casually employed extras, and, driven back to a threadbare room, Chaplin sat until darkness hid him.

One morning he marshaled all his courage and reported. He was assigned a dressing room occupied by Mack Swain, Fatty Arbuckle and one or two others. Chaplin could not indulge his desire for privacy. Perhaps, some day, he might have a dressing room of his own, such as Ford Sterling had.

Most of the Keystone comedians ignored Chaplin completely. One or two conceded that he had talent, but wouldn't go very far. He was so shy that the Keystone clowns did not seek his company. Nor did he seek theirs.

Pathé Lehrman paid some attention to Chaplin, and in the beginning had a little influence with the stranger. Sennett assigned Lehrman to direct Chaplin's initial picture, an opus

yclept *Making a Living*. Chaplin played a character part. Lehrman and Sennett played bits, the better to observe the new comedian.

Lehrman had a hard time persuading Chaplin to face the camera. This Cyclops spares no one, and that actor who learns to ignore the monster may find favor in his relentless eye. Mabel Normand was to have played the lead in this picture. It did not help matters when she sought to overcome Chaplin's timidity by taunts which only lashed his fears. The consequence was that he refused flatly to appear before the camera with her. Minta Durfee was substituted for Mabel.

Work begun, Chaplin miraculously shed his phobia. He began to ask pertinent questions. Nothing escaped him. His years of experience in the ancient art of pantomime gave him immense advantages in the field of pictorial expression. And now, while the picture was being taken, he startled everyone who had thought him so terribly backward and almost neurotically diffident. His comments had authority and vitality. He had *ideas*.

Lehrman had taken a scene at a street intersection. Then after an interval, he moved his camera two blocks away and around the corner. Chaplin refused point-blank to continue the action.

"We just made a scene two blocks away. Now you ask me to begin again here, and I am supposed to see a girl who

is two blocks away and around a corner. I couldn't possibly see her from here."

Lehrman explained that motion-picture sequences differed from stage continuity; that after the picture was cut and pieced together nobody would know, from a strict geographical standpoint, where or how the scene was taken.

Chaplin finally said he would let the picture progress, but muttered: "These men are fools."

When Sennett sat in his rocking-chair to see the first Chaplin picture, he was worried: "I'm absolutely sure we've got a find in the Englishman," he told Mabel, "but I feel in my bones that his first picture will be a flop."

"Maybe you'll be agreeably surprised," said Mabel. "This man has something—something you can't put your finger on."

"It's a talent," Sennett replied didactically. Then growing prophetic, he added: "But I see a flop in this picture."

Sennett sat in the gloom, his crownless Panama hat aslant on his brow and a solacing quid in his cheek. After the first fifty feet had been shown, his chair began to creak violently. His subordinates were not alarmed this time, for it was Sennett's mistake, not theirs, in hiring Chaplin. They felt safe—now that the rocking-chair had creaked its sinister message—in commenting freely upon the new comedian—if, indeed, he could be considered a comedian. Almost unanimously the projection-room oracles pronounced Chaplin a dismal liability.

"Just a minute," said Sennett. "He's a flop, eh? All right. Does anyone know why?"

Some bold lieutenant spoke. "Because he's no good."

Sennett arose for the defense. "No. It's his make-up. Those villain's mustaches and formal clothes! We'll change his make-up and see something."

When Sennett's backers, Kessel and Bauman, pre-viewed this first Chaplin picture, they groaned. Bauman came to California with no good tidings for Sennett's new protégé. Sterling's threatened resignation and Chaplin's first picture were twin anxieties for the Keystone executives.

"Mack," Bauman said, "you've made a great record, but this is one time you've gone crazy. The fellow, what's-his-name, is a complete bust. He isn't funny. And his contract with us isn't funny either. We're hooked for a year at \$125 a week. We can't stand many mistakes like that."

"Well, now, Bauman," said Mack, "the boy's all right. I tell you he's a good comedian. We just haven't found his pattern yet."

"You'll find it in a cheese factory," said Bauman.

"Bauman," Mack said, "we had a bad story; he wasn't made up like a comedian; and he's had no real attention. It's just a tough break for everybody, but I'm confident he'll be a good comedian someday, maybe a great one."

"You're very optimistic. I'm not. But you're running the studio. So go ahead."



There was some bad weather. The skies were overcast. Sennett was restless—three days had passed and all his companies were idle. What could he do? He suggested that his aides call the newspapers to find out if anything was going on that might be used as a background. The city editor of the *Times* reported that there was to be a children's bicycle race at Santa Monica. It was to be a five-mile contest.

"Lehrman," said Sennett, "take that young Englishman and whoever else you want out to Santa Monica."

On the morning of the juvenile race, Lehrman wandered into Charlie's dressing room. Unaware that he was being observed, Chaplin was doing an amazingly grotesque walk. To Lehrman it seemed as if he were watching a paretic prize-fighter jiggling on his heels, skidding, making abrupt and careening pirouettes, while his face became as forlorn and solemn as a Druid's. Lehrman was torn between laughter and awe at this tragi-comic rite. Fascinated, Pathé could only articulate:

"What the hell is *that*?"

Chaplin, abashed by having been caught in his grotesquerie, explained: "The man from whom I learned that walk seemed to have something wrong with his feet. And do you know? He was instructor in a school for crippled children. He could barely walk himself, yet he had been chosen to teach those unfortunate children *how to run*! Ironical, isn't it? You must have observed the same sort of thing in this business, too."

Lehrman pondered on this and replied irrelevantly: "Come on. We'll try that walk when we shoot the kids' bicycle race."

"Do you mind telling me the story of this picture?" Chaplin asked.

Lehrman guffawed. "We haven't got one—as usual. But don't let that worry you. We'll think one up when we get there."

"What a droll and resourceful profession!" said Chaplin.

"Get a make-up and come on," commanded Pathé. "We'll take a couple of Keystone Cops with us."

Chaplin's first make-up is the theme of several legends. No one has analyzed its symbolic significance in more minute detail than the erudite Rob Wagner, Hollywood's encyclopedist and epistemologist.

Lest anyone dispute Professor Wagner's qualifications to deliver *obiter dicta*, let it be known that he acquired his academic background as a teacher of Art, Greek and Wrestling at the Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. Among the luminaries who came under the influence of the sun-kist Aristotle were Frank Capra, Lawrence Tibbett, Marion Morgan and eight of her dancers, José Rodriguez, Phyllis Haver and District Attorney Buron Fitts. Wagner earned a reputation as a producer of scholastic theatricals. The boiler room in the basement of his school was the scene of his greatest exploits. The press made such a to-do over his productions that Wagner almost believed he was a born master of stagecraft. After seventeen of his students became

internationally famous, Professor Wagner reached the philosophical conclusion that all the tributes belonged rightfully to the plethora of talent in his class rooms. Like other prophets, Wagner incurred the ire of his pedagogical superiors because he kept no attendance rolls and permitted his charges to call him "Uncle Rob."

Over his kraut diet, at the Beverly Hills Brown Derby, the former Professor of Wrestling, and now the close friend and confidant of Charlie Chaplin, expounded to me the deep and premeditated symbolism of his idol's make-up:

"When Charlie came out to the studio for the first time, he was frightened by the fantastic dress of the extras standing around. Chaplin believed that pantomime is a distinct and different art. People in England found it acceptable and good art. When Chaplin saw the extras, he felt he couldn't go through with it and was discouraged. It was only after drinking a lot of coffee that he put himself in the frame of mind to go into the studio. And, once in, he found the pace violent and the costumes grotesque.

"After he had been razzed by almost everybody, Chaplin was asked to change hurriedly. He quickly devised for the first time the make-up that was to become a classic. He said to himself: 'Big hands aren't funny, but big feet are.' So he put on big shoes, the right one on the left foot and the left one on the right foot. He didn't think that coats are funny, but knew that pants are, so he put on baggy pants. Instead of making the hat big, he made it small. Each part of his

ensemble was a symbol, and if you misplace symbols, they then become ridiculous. All his stuff had to be shabby. He personified shabby gentility. And to top it off, he used a walking stick, because it was the final symbol of gentility. Shabby gentility is the keynote of much of Dickens's work."

As Minta Durfee remembers it, however, Chaplin borrowed his outfit at random from various persons. She says that his derby hat originally belonged to Minta's father, and, in turn, was worn by Fatty Arbuckle. The shoes were the property of the man whom he was destined to supplant on the throne of comedy—Ford Sterling. Only in this instance does the fact bear out Professor Wagner's contention of a highly symbolic choice. Charlie, who has small feet, put the shoes on in reverse order, merely because that was the surest way to keep them there.

Mack Swain had a large assortment of mustaches. Charlie tried one on, but it didn't satisfy him. It was too large. He began to clip it. By the time he had the right side balanced against the left, it was a very small appendage.

Whatever the source of Charlie's make-up, he went to Santa Monica with Lehrman. Pathé said: "Now you walk up and down in the foreground during the bike race. See the camera over there? It's a dummy. I will work the dummy camera, as though taking pictures. The real camera will photograph us. You get in my way all the time."

That was the "story." The rest was extemporaneous action. There were fights, shoves and mêlées—and the pe-

culiar hobble, with Chaplin balancing on one leg as he turned sharp corners and jiggled along. The entire picture was made in forty-five minutes. It was called *The Children's Automobile Race*.

Kessel and Bauman did not sneer this time. They knew that Keystone had "discovered" a new star. Letters came in by the thousands, asking: "Who is the funny little fellow with the little mustache and the funny walk?"

That funny little walk revolutionized screen comedy. Prior to the first moment when Chaplin sauntered before the camera, comedians labored under the compulsion to be violent and over-emphatic. Muscularity was an indispensable in the equipment of the comic. He had to be an explosive charge, detonating without surcease. Action was never allowed to lapse, and gag had to follow upon gag without an interval for breath. Chaplin reversed the whole process. His comedy was slow, deliberate and always understated. Instead of the bulging muscle, the frail frame. Instead of the staccato of guffaws, and heavy-handed caricatures, the catharsis of true laughter over the little man's plight in an antagonistic world. The poignant smile on Charlie's face and the grave movements of his body brought the tragic and comic spirits into perfect juxtaposition.

The old school, dimly aware of an impending calamity, prepared to defend itself. Ford Sterling derided Chaplin's method as being too slow and too obscure to survive. He felt that he could speak with authority, for he had made his own

ventures in slow-motion to the obbligato of "Hearts and Flowers." If he, the nonpareil, had failed in his pioneer experiment, what chance had a shuffling tyro like Chaplin?

Sennett, even with the will to believe box-office figures, suffered recurrent qualms. The slow tempo of the Chaplin technique was as subversive as a nihilistic doctrine in the vestry. Hitherto, Mack had stipulated that every gag must be begun, pointed and consummated within twenty feet of film. Chaplin barely got started in a hundred feet. Perplexed as he undoubtedly was by the implications of a new art form, Mack found ample solace in the public response. The dissenting comedians, their backs to the wall, would not capitulate without a fight. They felt that a duel to the artistic death between their champion, Sterling, and the puny challenger would settle the issue with finality. That duel came with Chaplin's third picture. It was directed by Pathé Lehrman, a comedy called *Between Showers*.

It had been raining. The skies made the Californians wince as they apologized for the deluge to tourists. Lehrman wanted to get away from the studio—the world's most depressing place on a wet day. He took Sterling, Chaplin, a girl and a policeman, put them in a car and started down Main street. When Lehrman saw a wide puddle, he stopped and began the picture.

The background consisted of citizens hopping across the street and wading through the puddle.

Lehrman called: "Places." He gave final instructions to

the principals and the action began. Charlie Chaplin was never more deliberate. Sterling plunged into the routine. The two styles clashed violently. Sterling's over-emphasis, all the muscular resources of his repertoire were called upon to engulf Chaplin. Goliath made his first rushing bid for victory. David, calm, detached and a little sad, stood his ground. A twirl of the cane, a lift of an eyebrow, a mournful wiggle of his mustache, a chivalrous raising of his derby and a tentative little kick against his own posterior—these deadly pellets brought the giant to earth.

Although defeated in this engagement, Sterling still would not acknowledge that the war was over. Chaplin's *coup de grâce* was only delayed until another day.

Mabel Normand was making a picture called *Mabel's Predicament*. The gags were not measuring up to standard, and Sennett thought the picture "draggy." He demanded new gags, new consultants, new actors to salvage the comedy.

"Where's the Englishman?"

The King of Comedy usually had called for the mighty Sterling whenever a picture threatened to die in the birth. The sudden call for Chaplin came as a complete surprise to the cast. Charlie put on his make-up, and walked on the set. The actors were gathered in what purported to be the lobby of a hotel.

Chaplin sauntered into the lobby, doing his funny walk, and nonchalantly started to use the phone. Then he discovered that it cost five cents. He had no nickel. Mabel came

in with a dog, and Charlie was egregiously polite to her. He got mixed up with the dog, tripped over a leash, fell, his hand submerged in a cuspidor, all the time acting with a betrayed dignity while the hotel clerk looked on with a menacing eye. This scene ran for an unprecedented one hundred and thirty-six feet. At its close, the actors—at last compelled to concede Chaplin's supremacy—began to roar with laughter and applaud.

Sterling was sitting in his dressing room when he heard the roar of the crowd. Alarmed, he ran to the door and looked out. He saw the little Englishman walk tragically to his own quarters, as oblivious to the applause of his colleagues as he had been to their derision.

Sterling knew that a great star had risen. It was a calamity to him, but he took it with the courage of a champion.

Sterling was now fully aware that he *had* to quit Keystone. He wanted to do his own pictures under his own name. Lehrman now had split with Sennett. Together with Fred Balshofer, pioneer picture executive, the two Sennett stalwarts formed a company. This was in the summer of 1914, and the World War had begun. Sterling wanted to call the concern "The Sterling Motion Picture Company."

"We can't do that," Lehrman said, "because you're a German. And if we put your name up too prominently, it may offend anti-German customers. And another thing, Ford, you've got to stop playing German rôles."



Sterling bridled. "For two years I've worked all the time to establish myself. I became the greatest Dutch comedian in the world, and I'll not give up the character."

"You'd better be just a plain American comedian," said Lehrman. "We can't take chances."

"I refuse to do that," said Sterling. "I'll play the Dutchman or nothing. And we'll name it the Sterling Company."

Lehrman was making a picture called *Hearts and Swords*, to be released through Universal. He was faced by financial hazards. If the picture required an extra day in the shooting, the profit would be jeopardized. Lehrman decided upon a seven o'clock call, so that a good start could be made. Sterling didn't show up until after noon, and he seemed exhausted.

Lehrman was furious. "If I'm able to get up at seven, so are you. I'm quitting."

Balshofer and Sterling got together and decided they could manage very well without him.

Lehrman then formed the L-K-O Company (Lehrman Knock-Out). He asked Mabel Normand to join his new outfit. He told her he could not afford to give her more than \$250 a week. He suggested that she go to Sennett and see if he would raise her from the \$100 which she now was getting. She did so, and Mack met the offer with \$250. Then Lehrman increased his offer to \$400. Sennett met that proposition also, and hated Lehrman all the more cordially.

D. W. Griffith returned to Los Angeles in February of 1914. He was big with *The Birth of a Nation*. The accouchement was being arranged with more mystery than the mumbo-jumbos that were going on that year in the chancelleries of Europe. When Sennett saw the smoke coming from the wigwam of Medicine-Man Griffith, he was stirred to ambitious projects. If *The Birth of a Nation* was to be a multiple-reel spectacle, nobody would find him outdone. He cast about for a comedy and a star worthy of a mile of uproarious celluloid.

He recalled the phenomenal stage success of Marie Dressler in *Tillie's Nightmare*. In fact, one of his favorite songs stemmed from that opera—"Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl." He imported the popular comédienne from Broadway and gave her Chaplin as a foil. In true Hollywood fashion, and with their left-handed sagacity, the title was amended to *Tillie's Punctured Romance*. Ordinarily Sennett devoted from forty-five minutes to a week to the making of his comedies. The herculean industry of Griffith induced Mack to ignore the existence of time. *Tillie's Punctured Romance* was to be Sennett's great extravagance, a lavish expenditure of time and money on six reels of comedy—the first six-reel comedy ever screened.

The acknowledged stature of Marie Dressler as a comédienne led Chaplin's detractors to predict that the little fellow would be totally eclipsed by the radiance of authentic art. When the picture was shown, no one could dispute the

gifts of Marie Dressler. But those who applied the term "genius" to Charlie Chaplin were vindicated in their judgment.

Since then the rank of genius has been accorded the little tragi-comedian in every civilized land of the world.

## *Chapter 18*

### ALL GOD'S STEPCHILDREN

**T**HE rest of the world may have discerned elements of genius in a few of the actors now making strange antics before the three-legged Cyclops, yet the citizenry of Hollywood looked upon the motion-picture mummers as practitioners of the black arts. Eventually, Southern California's boards of trade were willing to reap the commercial advantages of a new industry.

When the remarkable discovery was made that actors are sometimes people, who bled when pricked, who could be taxed and fined, the aloof natives went so far as to acknowledge, albeit grudgingly, a place to them in the California sun. The more daring liberals actually went so far as to say that they knew some actors who were really nice people.

It must be remembered that in Los Angeles, as elsewhere in prosperous America, the average amusement seeker reached the zenith of revelry while listening to phonographs that played cylindrical records beneath goose-necked horns. It was a time when only the most depraved female would paint her face, march in suffrage parades, or forego the traditional coy hints while knitting certain small garments and say candidly and to the point: "I am pregnant."

The motion-picture studios were responsible for a land boom. This attracted settlers. Payrolls multiplied week by week. As ever, economic factors were potent enough to convert outspoken scorn into pained resignation. The local beneficiaries did not throw bricks at the actors, but they reserved the right to consider them as impious freaks, to be shunned as much as business expediency would warrant.

Whenever Selig's noisy cowboys or Ince's intoxicated cavalry came riding down the pike, mothers drove their inquisitive children indoors until these plagues would pass by. When Sennett's epileptic merry-andrews appeared, leaping and chastising one another with two-by-fours, the martyred burghers barricaded their doors against these Pied Pipers.

The social outcasts of the movie colony were thrown upon their own devices as they searched for extra-mural activities. Even the pariah longs to eat, drink and be merry. The picture folk, in their quest for food, found cafés to their taste. To quench their thirst, they found sanctuary in saloons. After a day of sadistic slap-stick, nothing made them mer-

rier than to sit safely among the audience and observe two prize fighters maiming each other, thus satisfying the immemorial human need that has impelled busmen to go riding on their holidays.

One of the earliest popular resorts was Nat Goodwin's café. The former Broadway comedian had his establishment on the ocean front at Santa Monica. The Ship Café was opened shortly afterward and at once became popular. Abe Lyman, the animated musician, worked at the Ship Café and then moved on to the Sunset Inn.

There was a small, eight-stool lunch-cubby called John's, which was popular for late-hour groups. Eddie Brandstatter opened the elaborate Montmartre and it became a rendezvous for the film folk. Al Levy, the ageless god of the plank steak, had a restaurant in Spring street where the pioneers frequently dined.

The roly-poly Baron Long, now the lessee of the Los Angeles Biltmore and one of the founders of the Agua Caliente race track, had a café at Vernon, a Los Angeles suburb. Harry Richman played a small piano and the guests threw coins at him. Buddy de Silva, the song writer, was one of the Baron's entertainers. He strummed the ukulele and posed as a Hawaiian.

Baron Long's Vernon Country Club was regarded as the greatest cabaret in the world. Here, among their own people, the players could forget the restraints imposed on them by their estimable neighbors and detractors. If anyone

stepped out of line, got drunk or caused trouble, the offender was disciplined. The penalty for a grievous moral lapse was a suspension of two weeks.

Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle and other Sennett luminaries preferred the atmosphere of fight clubs to that of genteel drawing rooms. They had a fling at the management of bruisers. Sometimes they even climbed into the ring, buckets in hands and towels about necks, to second their fistic idols.

One of the foremost fight clubs was operated by Jack Doyle. Until the year 1909, Doyle presided at the throttle of a Southern Pacific railroad locomotive on the run between Los Angeles and Yuma. Doyle left the rails and opened a saloon in Arcadia, a suburb of Los Angeles. The next year he promoted himself to the ownership of a saloon and training quarters for prize fighters at Thirty-eighth street and Santa Fe avenue in Vernon. The Doyle camp was nearly a mile below Uncle Tom McCarey's famous fight arena.

Vernon was an incorporated village. Mr. Doyle was its boss. He appointed the police and bought their uniforms and other equipment. He also built a church for his town. Across the street from his camp was a restaurant—which he also owned. His fighters ate there. The more fortunate ones slept in bungalows built on his estate. The others slept wherever they might.

The rosy-cheeked Mr. Doyle's saloon occupied a strategic point in his amusement center. A patron entered at the cor-

ner of Thirty-eighth and Santa Fe. He immediately saw a hall of mirrors and one of the longest bars in the world. That shelf could support at least four hundred pairs of elbows. From forty to fifty bartenders stood like soldiers in a trench awaiting an attack. By the time a man had had a drink near the door and started toward the training quarters at the rear of the big building, he was thirsty again. There was a large admonitory sign on the wall addressed to those patrons who might otherwise have suffered a lapse of memory concerning their dear ones. It was the lyrical creation of Mr. Doyle himself and read:

"If your children need shoes,  
Don't buy booze."

The attenuated bar, with its array of glimmering tumblers, decanters, pyramided wine and whiskey glasses, ran the length of the great refreshment chamber, turned a corner and debouched on a card room. That room sometimes served as a conference hall for political caucuses and often witnessed the signing of articles between eminent pugilists. The free-lunch counter was in the card room. Its bosom swelled with all manner of salt dishes, which renewed the thirst of those who had managed to come by forced marches through the bar-room. The temptation to return to the elongated bar virtually became a necessity. Nobody ever died of thirst at Doyle's.

In the card room, as in the bar, there were pictures of



famous prize fighters. A portrait of John L. Sullivan hung above the free lunch. The former king of the heavyweights wore a scowl and stared down as though to warn gourmands not to take unsportsmanlike advantage of Mr. Doyle's hospitality.

The training camp, at the rear of the card room, was reached through a narrow hallway. The gentlemen's wash-room flanked this passageway. A man was strong-willed indeed who could go through the Doyle labyrinth and come upon the training-yard without having assuaged his thirst.

All the big fighters of the day, as well as preliminary boys, has-beens and hope-to-bes, trained at Jack Doyle's camp. The crowds that gathered to watch were drawn from what reporters are wont to call "all walks of life." There were pickpockets, fences, promoters and we-boys. Also there were such celebrities as Earl Rogers, famed criminal attorney and father of Adela Rogers St. John, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Cudahy, Anita Baldwin and the entire movie crowd. Ladies did not enter saloons in those days. Men had a modicum of privacy. Doyle cut a door in the fence which surrounded the training-yard, and a sentinel bowed damsels and matrons in at this gate.

A patron entered the enclosure to find a boxing-ring, over which a roof had been built to shield the gladiators from the enervating sun. The audience, however, sat in the open. There were two sections for the spectators. One was an array of reserved boxes, from which the ladies and their es-

corts could order beer and watch the proceedings with mellow gentility. The roughnecks occupied the bleachers.

To the right of the arena, and looking from the card-room door, was a sort of stockade which surrounded the dressing quarters of the plug uglies. Taking a leaf from Mack Sennett's book, Doyle had installed a swimming tank inside this rectangle. A very dilapidated and unused tennis court had found its way, presumably by mistake, into the architect's plans. It is hardly likely that there was a man within five miles of Vernon who knew the difference between a tennis racket and a crab-net.

Of a Sunday morning, and just when the day's business began to boom and the Saturday night hang-overs were about to be subdued, a sacred procession passed the Doyle doors. Two nuns led this throng of youngsters. The boys were dressed in their Sunday finest and often the little girls wore flowers in their hair. They always marched down Thirty-eighth street and past Doyle's, there to turn the corner and proceed to church. Doyle stationed a huge Irish cop in front of the swinging doors of his emporium to prevent any drunkard from wandering out while the nuns and their charges were passing.

Doyle's Arena was the scene of many titular fights. In one of them, a lightweight champion of the world was called upon to meet an exceptionally tough and hot-headed challenger. The champion was an arrant playboy and had neglected to train properly.

After an eleventh-hour consideration of his lack of condition, the champion evolved a strategic plan which combined business with pleasure. He made advances to the hot-tempered challenger's comely wife and was accepted as her clandestine sweetheart. The night before the fight, the champion called on the challenger's missus. Her husband—as lovers always believe—was safe in bed elsewhere. Nobody knew better than the champion that the challenger's place of rest on the night before a fight was in his training camp. Toward midnight the couple were disturbed. The champion leaped out of bed before a light was struck and escaped through an open window. The infuriated challenger, unaware who had been in his nest, wasted some of his best blows on his spouse.

When the fighters were called to the center of the ring the next afternoon, the experts remarked that the champion seemed in bad form, that he faced defeat and the loss of his title. After the referee had instructed the men as to their conduct during the twenty-round engagement, the champion said to the challenger:

"Well, last night I put your wife to sleep. Tonight I'm going to do the same thing for you. I was the guy that dived through the window."

The challenger had a brain-storm. It took all the seconds and four policemen to hold him in check until the opening bell. When the gong rang he had lost his head completely. He swung and lunged and wore himself threadbare, while the

champion danced in a relaxed manner, merely avoiding the blows. By the tenth round the challenger was exhausted. The champion now set to work and cut him to ribbons.

At the close of the contest, the challenger was barely able to say to his antagonist: "I'm going to kill you when I get dressed."

"That's all right with me," said the champion. "You'll find me at your wife's home."

A great favorite with the movie colony was the famous lightweight, Rudolph ("Boer") Unholtz. He fought the masterful Negro, Joe Gans, at the Vernon Club. The fight was stopped during the twelfth round. In his dressing room, Unholtz said: "The only time I touched Joe was when we shook hands."

Charlie Eyton, afterward a motion-picture magnate, refereed a fight between Unholtz and George Memsic at the Vernon Arena. In the very first round Memsic landed on Unholtz's chin with his justly renowned right fist and knocked the Boer into the second row of spectators. From his squatting position on a patron's lap, Unholtz yelled:

"Don't count, Charlie. This crooked gambler is holding my tights."

When Battling Nelson was lightweight champion, Unholtz met him in the ring, and, when he saw Nelson coming in, wide open, let go with a hitherto-devastating left hook. It caught Nelson flush on the chin, but the durable champion never batted an eye. Unholtz backed away, raised his hand,

commanding a halt, and said: "Just a minute. I want to see what's holding this guy up!"

Unholtz had lost most of his voice in a peculiar ring accident in Colorado. He was fighting Stanley Soakum Yoakum and fell half-way through the ropes. As he tried to get back, the top rope was under his chin and across his Adam's apple. Yoakum hit the rope, which in turn bruised the Boer's larynx. This injury resulted in a tuberculous infection, from which the Boer died in a shanty across the street from Sennett's Edendale studio. Harry Gribbon and two other Sennett comedians were with the Boer as he died. He kept trying to rise from his cot, calling in a wheezy voice: "By God! They'll never count me out!"

Another favorite of the comedians was Kid Blue, the Negro fighter. He worked for Sennett whenever there were pictures calling for a lion tamer. One night the Kid was fighting very poorly. He missed his opponent with almost every blow. His second, Fatty Arbuckle, called out:

"Hey! Hit him where he is—not where he *was*!"

On another occasion the Kid sustained a cut inside his lip. He resigned under fire. His manager almost sobbed: "You're not going to quit fighting on us!"

"Oh, no," said the Kid. "I'm going to fight some more—but not tonight."

Mack Sennett was an ardent fight fan. The comic spirit that had made millions of people laugh needed occasional

replenishment. Nowhere else could Sennett find more wholesome amusement than was displayed in the ring of Doyle's Arena. The shenanigans of the tin-eared gentry were often hilarious. But Sennett was always on the lookout for a little more than hilarity. He fished for talent in unexpected waters, and usually made a surprising catch.

It was among the fighters of Doyle's Arena that the King of Comedy found one of his most helpful aides—Al McNeil. Lest Mr. McNeil be mistaken for an actor, let it be understood clearly that he never assumed the exhibitionist's motley. On the contrary, McNeil remained always in the background, in fact, literally in the dark. He became Sennett's film-cutter (or editor), a post of the greatest responsibility and requiring the most expert skill. Sennett himself insists that McNeil was incomparably his best cutter. As an illustration of his resourcefulness, McNeil once gathered the discarded fragments of twenty Keystone comedies, patched them together and created a highly successful picture for his employer. The story's incongruous leaps were reconciled when the comedy was presented as a man's "dream."

The rise of McNeil as a boxer coincided with the repeal of the twenty-round fight game in California. The outlawing, in 1914, of the long-distance bouts did much to lessen the lure of Doyle's Arena.

The promoters, however, were not to be entirely done in by the law. They began a scramble to promote amateur fights. These were legal affairs but were limited to four rounds. All

professional fighters, with the exception of those who were nationally known, hastened to become "amateurs."

Barney Oldfield, greatest of automobile racers, owned a saloon at Spring street, near Sixth. Upstairs there was a spacious loft, which became the Western Athletic Club. This establishment had been purchased by H. A. Wadhams from the actor, William S. Hart, who had been a boxer in his day. An entire floor was removed to give greater height to the auditorium. The seats were arranged in steep tiers. The ring was but twelve feet square. The smallest regulation ring is eighteen feet. The abbreviated battleground assured terrific fights, with a maximum of slugging and a minimum of dancing or pugilistic flirtation. A mere four rounds also encouraged a furious pace, with twelve minutes of concentrated combat as against the twenty-round bouts with their hour of more leisurely struggle.

The "amateurs" had to be satisfied with second-hand gloves, picked up at a bargain from other fight clubs. Most of these mittens bore the blood of old engagements, and in many cases were almost without padding.

Among the fight addicts at the Western Athletic Club were Charlie Murray, Arbuckle, Chaplin, Kathleen Williams, Ham and Budd (the Essanay comedy team), Mabel Normand, Mack Sennett, Slim Summerville, Lew Cody and Bobby Dunn. The tobacco smoke was so dense during the main event that the spectators could hardly see one another, not to mention the fighters. It was this foggy atmosphere

that permitted Al McNeil to fight twice on the same night, once under the name of Jack Gordon and again as Kid McNeil.

McNeil was an indomitable fighter. When Sennett found out that he was smart enough to collect two purses in one evening, he said he wanted "that kind of brains at Keystone." The comedians were especially fond of McNeil because they were almost sure of an impromptu brawl whenever they took him on parties. He was a very peaceable and almost frail-looking fellow when dressed for the street. He had a mild manner of speech. He was almost as shy as Chaplin. This led bullies and fresh citizens to pick on him. He endured their insults and seemed about ready to cry. He weighed one hundred and fifteen pounds and it was a crime for a big fellow to hit him. The temptation was so great, however, that even the burliest instigator could not resist. Unfortunately for the provocateur, the shrinking violet became a copse of poison-oak. He was a buzz-saw, a hornet, a scourge and a pile-driver. Once a blow had been directed at him, he set to work with a will.

When the "amateur" fight clubs got under way, the emolument for a preliminary boy was \$1 per fight. The main-event pugilists received \$3 to \$7.50. McNeil was a \$7.50 boy, and, by appearing *twice* on a program, collected \$15.

These athletes seldom performed on a winner-take-all basis, for the very good reason that a fighter might receive a surprise knockout from an obscure quarter. He might be



hit by a bottle hurled by a spectator or he might not be liked by the referee. A biased arbiter might hold a pugilist's arm, thus leaving his opponent free to deal out a devastating blow during the breakaway. There were sinister hazards. The rubber hose that served as ropes was tied to the ring-posts in a manner that left the corner stanchions exposed. If a warrior were rushed hard, backed into a corner, got cracked by a fist, and at the same moment rammed by a post, he was not worth much as an entertainer for the rest of the evening.

If a gladiator happened to be in his opponent's corner, his antagonist's seconds were apt to trip him. Another trick favored by ringside consultants was to wait until the foe came their way. As soon as their victim got set to deliver a blow, a crafty mentor would reach through the ropes and grab his arm, thus leaving him open for a quick punch. These little irregularities, of course, caused terrific imbroglios between the seconds.

The battlers chose hard-boiled bottle-and-sponge men for their handlers. McNeil's seconds usually were Rough House Burns, Jock Hennessey and Shovel Nose Murphy.

McNeil persuaded Wadhams to raise the admission fee for his fight with the great flyweight, Frankie Dolan. Charlie Chaplin was to be Dolan's principal second, and Fatty Arbuckle took Shovel Nose Murphy's place in McNeil's corner. It was arranged between Dolan and McNeil that the former should win the fight. It was in the bag.

The house was crowded when Messrs. Chaplin and Arbuckle came down the smoky aisles with their pugilists. The two comedians were utterly unaware of the business arrangement between their charges. Large wagers were laid on the outcome of this event. In the first round, Dolan almost sustained a knockout through carelessness as he bounced into McNeil's right hand. He sank to the resin. The promoters and McNeil almost had heart-failure. If Dolan lost, the entire purse would have been his under the terms of their highly ethical pact. He rose, however, at the urgent prodings of Mr. Chaplin and other supporters. Dolan salvaged the remaining three rounds and received the referee's decision.

To safeguard the fighters from the demoralizing taint of professionalism, the promoters gave medals. There were two sets of these tokens for each event, of which there usually were eight or ten. One medal was given to the winner of a contest, as a first prize. The other, as consolation, was awarded the loser. Later in the evening, or possibly next day, the medals were put back into currency by the fighters when they were given receipts for them, convertible at par. As the four-round game developed, the outstanding amateurs received as much as \$2,000 when they cashed their medals.

McNeil won the amateur bantam-weight championship of the Pacific Coast at the Los Angeles Athletic Club, where Sennett now resided. Later he turned professional and won the Pacific title in that class. Then he became an amateur

again. His backers and seconds included at various times Jack Conway, now a director, Mack Sennett, Arbuckle and Mal St. Clair, then a newspaper cartoonist.

McNeil may have been lethal with his opponents, but he was generous to the point of becoming compromised with his friends. The night he was scheduled to fight Champion Williams at Vernon, his deadliness and his kindness were put to a test.

McNeil and St. Clair were outlining the plan of battle in a Los Angeles restaurant three hours before ring-time. In a few moments they would take a Vernon street car and arrive in ample time for McNeil to relax in slumber. Fighters usually sleep an hour or more before the main event, and sometimes, alas, for the last ten seconds of the bout.

As McNeil and St. Clair were calling for their bill, Promoter Wadhams of the Western Athletic Club rushed in. He seemed hysterical. Gradually it came out that one of his pork-and-beans dependables had failed to appear for that night's smoker. The house was sold out and the customers were booing their impatience. Wadhams pleaded with McNeil, tears in his voice, to take the place of the defaulting boxer.

McNeil cited three incontrovertible objections: "Good God, Wadhams, I'd like to oblige you, but I've just put away a steak; I don't want to be late at Vernon; and, gee whiz, it's for the title."

"I know all that," said the lachrymose Wadhams, "but my

back's against the wall. You got to help me. This boy hasn't got a thing. You can belt him out and make Vernon in plenty of time. Come on, Al. I'll never forget it."

The appeal was not lost on the ever-obliging McNeil. "I'll do it as a favor."

When McNeil climbed into the Western Athletic Club ring, the booing subsided. He was introduced under his *nom de guerre*, Jack Gordon. The bell rang. The men advanced. While appraising his opponent's unorthodox stance, McNeil became acutely aware of the steak he had just eaten. He dropped his guard to pull up his tights. As he did so his ungainly antagonist let go with a random right-hand swing that caught McNeil on the chin. Nobody was more amazed than the obscure preliminary boy when the referee counted out McNeil-Gordon.

Under the mournfully tender ministrations of St. Clair, McNeil recovered consciousness on the Vernon street car.

"What happened?" he asked.

St. Clair could not deny the facts. He tried to tell him he had just had his nap, which, strictly speaking, was the truth.

They arrived at Doyle's Arena a little late. The trolley ride had been a tonic. As McNeil entered the ring, St. Clair trembled in anticipation of catastrophe. During the fight, McNeil was not aware that the resounding cheers were for him. When the referee raised his hand as the new champion, McNeil became the hero of a fantastic legend of fistiana—the

only boxer ever to sustain a knockout in one ring and on the same night win a championship in another.

At length McNeil yielded to Sennett's persuasions and went to work at the Edendale studio. So eager was he to learn the business that he began as handy man, prop boy and assistant in the cutting department. At this time the cutting, or editing, of a picture was less complicated than it is today. There were few involved plots. The main elements of a picture were action, thrill and tempo.

After he had learned the rudiments of film-cutting, McNeil was assigned to help the convivial Jim Davis, one of Sennett's favorite directors. They had been designated to make a scenario called *Her Last Go*. Sennett usually had frowned upon written stories for his films, but had yielded to the pressure of his artistic aides and said he would "try a few scripts, just to give them enough rope."

On re-reading the scenario of *Her Last Go*, Sennett was disgusted and threw it into the waste basket. The subsequent fate of this manuscript was the foundation for an incredible scene in a Broadway play, but, none the less, here are the facts:

After Sennett had discarded the script of *Her Last Go*, he called Davis in and gave him another story.

Davis, unfortunately, had taken too many drinks that afternoon. He lost the new story. In a panic, he went back to Sennett's office. The King of Comedy was out. Davis

rummaged through the waste basket and found what he believed to be his story. In all innocence, he proceeded with the shooting of the junked opus. Half-way through the reel he was startled by the discovery that he was making *Her Last Go*. It was too late to stop. Davis sought solace in more drinks.

Sennett was apoplectic when he saw the picture he had thrown into limbo. An added source of embarrassment was his promise of a Davis picture to Sid Grauman, who by now had a million-dollar theater in Los Angeles.

Sennett fired Davis and McNeil. He telephoned Grauman to explain his predicament:

"The picture I promised you has been made; but I'll be on the level with you, it didn't turn out as well as I thought."

"Send it along anyway," Grauman said. "I'll take a chance."

With some misgivings, Mack delivered the film to Grauman. The comedy made such a hit that Sid accorded it the distinction of spelling out its full title in electric lights on the marquee.

Sennett re-hired McNeil forthwith and sent a posse to find Davis. The director was hauled out of a saloon and brought back to the lot. Sennett reinstated him with a salary increase. Davis swore off drinking, and critics aver that he never made another good picture.

McNeil's greatest adventure with Sennett came on the occasion of the première of the Mabel Normand vehicle

*Molly-O*. This was the most ambitious comedy ever undertaken by Sennett. In point of time, it followed the success *Mickey*, which is an episode that rightfully belongs in a subsequent chapter.

Sennett and his lieutenants tried in every way to cut *Molly-O* from ten reels to the stipulated six. By dint of great effort, they reduced its length to seven reels. On the afternoon of the première at Santa Barbara, some ninety miles away, Sennett gave up trying to pare his masterpiece.

"The trouble is," he said, "I'm too close to it. I've given so much money, time and effort that I hate to cut it any more. We'll just have to show the seven reels and see how the audience reacts. We'll cut the parts they like least. Take the seven cans to Santa Barbara, boys."

That night McNeil was sitting in the cutting room at Edendale, wondering how the première of *Molly-O* was faring. He was ready to go home when he saw a film-can which looked familiar. He examined it and learned, to his horror, that it contained all of Reel 5 of *Molly-O*. This was a major catastrophe.

McNeil automatically realized that he would be fired. The head cutter had commissioned him explicitly to give the precious seven cans to a special messenger. McNeil had neglected to send one of the reels! He staggered out, the can under his arm. Torn between an instinct to act bravely by taking the orphaned reel to Santa Barbara and the very human urge to get paralyzed drunk, he wondered why he had ever

abandoned the safe and sane profession of pugilism. At this critical moment the property man was coming toward the gate on his motorcycle.

"For the love of God," said the former bantam-weight champion, "ride me to Santa Barbara."

"Can't do it," said the property man. "I got a date to play rummy with my girl's father."

"Ride me to Santa Barbara," muttered McNeil, "or I'll knock you stiff!"

They started out. The motorcycle balked along the way. They ran out of fuel. They had a flat tire. All the ailments known to vehicles depending upon internal combustion afflicted the two-wheeled conveyance. They arrived at Santa Barbara just as the crowd emerged from the theater. McNeil was pale and sick at the stomach. He hunted for Sennett among the noisy throng. He found him in the foyer. A group surrounded the King of Comedy. For some reason, obscure to McNeil, everybody looked benign and in a congratulatory mood.

McNeil blinked when Sennett saw him. The King advanced toward his trembling subject, clapped him on the shoulder and said:

"It was a stroke of genius! All of us tried for weeks to cut that picture, and, by God, you were the only one with guts enough and brains enough to see that we had one whole reel that was crying for cutting. It was the biggest hit of my



career, and, by God, from now on, McNeil, you are the head-cutter at my studio at a good, stiff raise."

The hero of many bloody battles in street and ring almost fainted. The can of film fell to the foyer floor.

"What you got there?" asked Mack.

"Nothing," said McNeil. "Just a can of film I want to tinker with some day."

Southern California, with economic sagacity, began at length to exercise a proud paternalism toward its successful stepchildren. When they had made a place for themselves in the world, their minor peccadilloes were forgiven. Their amiable weaknesses were attributed to healthy animal spirits. Wisely, the legislators imposed no censorship rules on the films. Yet prior to the time that D. W. Griffith produced *The Birth of a Nation*, the motion picture and its people were anathema to the pillars of California society.

As evidence of the righteous citizens' reluctance to accept the film folk as anything but impious freaks, children of the community were forbidden to approach the contagion areas of Hollywood. When Mae Marsh was a student at Hollywood High School, she violated the taboo by joining the cast of *The Birth of a Nation*. The faculty snubbed her. Some of her fellow students mauled her and made her life so miserable that she had to leave school. A few pupils who had inherent ideas of fair play wanted to see the picture in the making before casting stones at their schoolmate. They vis-

ited the Griffith location. Their venial sin was discovered and they were expelled from school.

When Griffith announced the release of *The Birth of a Nation* in Clune's Auditorium (now the Philharmonic), a pious howl arose. A congregation of Baptists held Sunday services in this hall. They regarded a motion-picture show as an iniquitous intrusion. Pastors elsewhere took up the hue and cry. But after they had seen the Griffith masterpiece, they came away full to the ears with moral sanction.

It was becoming increasingly apparent that the movies were a major force in the social and educational life of the world. Those who condemned them most violently shifted their ground. They put on a cloak of sanctity, arose in their pulpits and forums and proclaimed, with wide-sweeping reservations, that the cinema might yet become an evangelical force.

But the elastic reservations can always be counted upon to give these ranting Jeremiahs full scope for their jittery diatribes. With orgastic frenzy, they describe Hollywood as St. Beelzebub's See, and denounce its children as the remote offspring of Sodom and Gomorrah. The oratorical blasts of flatulent vicars, as they denounce the playful high jinks of the motion-picture capital, succeed only in making little boys and girls shiver—and long to go right out there.

Poor Hollywood! It is as quiet as any other graveyard. It has no night life whatever. There are two hundred and thirteen accredited newspaper and magazine correspondents on

the lookout for the least delinquency. This power of the press and the public avidity for scandal are a thousand times more effective than the finger-shakings and tongue-lashings of the moralists.

It was no mere prank when Marshall Neilan, the director, rushed into the lobby of the palatial Hotel Ambassador, a bundle of newspapers under his arm, and shouted:

“Extra! Extra! All about a white girl marrying a movie actor!”

## *Chapter 19*

### FIDDLERS THREE

**M**ACK SENNETT may never have heard of Shakespeare's admonition to suit action to the word. All the rollicking comedies sponsored by him showed superlative disdain for the word which embellishes or cloaks action. Motion pictures, to him, were entirely visual, a kaleidoscope of images which, unaided by literary devices, carried their own meaning.

Sennett was scornful of the written word, as such. He depended largely on happy improvisations for his early pictures. His far-flung enterprises at length precluded a hit-and-miss dependence upon inspirations. There were as many as nineteen comedies in the process of being filmed simultaneously. The time would come when the five hundred

French farces he had accumulated and revamped would be exhausted. If the most inventive dramatic chef threw these five hundred Gallic plots into a single casserole and let it simmer a fortnight, the result would be—Cinderella.

When high-salaried comedians were kept idle, due to lack of story material, Sennett's blood-pressure mounted with the overhead. He had no recourse but to turn to the scriveners.

"I don't want *what* they write," he rationalized. "I want the brains that are behind their writing."

Sennett's distrust of the written word need not be taken for a gross illiteracy. He was convinced that authors seduced themselves with their own phrases. Besides, he was positive that a story gains more in the telling than in the writing. What cannot be remembered as oral narrative is not worth remembering. He clinched his argument beyond rebuttal by unexpectedly citing Homer and the Old Testament as monumental examples of word-of-mouth masterpieces.

It was fortunate that someone had provided him with such classic precedents, for it was on this ruling that he denied the appeals of his authors for typewriters and quills. These toolless artisans had to produce their plots and character studies vocally and extemporaneously. When any newcomer among the scribes pleaded for a sheet of paper or a pencil, Sennett would say:

"Don't write the story—tell it. You'll always find people more willing to listen than to read."

The telling of a tale is, at best, an ephemeral accomplish-

ment. Its moment is brief; it is a child of the present, and it dies as it creates its effect.

In the Sennett scheme, all stories were a compilation of fragments contributed under the exigencies of necessity and the flare of inspiration. No one man could claim fatherhood to the ultimate screen story. The work was all anonymous and communal. Thus was founded a new school of fragmentary writers—the gag-men. This inelegant title in no way indicates the vital contribution to motion pictures from these resourceful and sparkling artists. In every crisis they are called upon to perform miracles on moribund productions.

Nowhere else in Hollywood did the gag-men enjoy such prestige as prevailed at Sennett's Edendale studio. A miscellany of wags, bonded together by the loose camaraderie of contempt, made Mack ponder on human ingratitude. To instill a grain of *esprit de corps* and to create a semblance of organization, Sennett housed them in a bungalow of their own and sought for someone, in the rôle of "scenario editor," who could harness these unbroken colts. He experimented with several *Führers*. Craig Hutchinson was one of the early incumbents. When Hampton Del Ruth received a call, as a gag-man, he pondered over his qualifications.

"What could you do with a fellow like me?" he asked Hutchinson. "I'm a playwright."

"Don't worry," replied Hutchinson confidently. "What we want is dramatists—men who can write drama tilted a bit. Put the silk hat on cock-eyed."

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The weekly salary of \$40 permitted Del Ruth to indulge in few excesses. He enjoyed sitting at a table with three or four of his confrères to sip beer and discuss nothing but gags. There he speculated on the curious fate of a serious dramatist occupied with such trivia.

One night Sennett and Fatty Arbuckle entered the café. The King of Comedy saw his underlings and thought it a good time to exploit them after office hours. As he approached their table, he overheard Del Ruth order "Rack of Lamb, à la Mack Sennett," which was emblazoned on the bill of fare. It was a dish cooked with champagne.

Mack placed his order and straightway began a story conference over the rack of lamb. He and Arbuckle were concocting a jewel-robbery scenario. The husband had stolen his wife's gems. He was on the roof and she was down below, howling at him, shaking her fist and umbrella, and demanding that he return the loot. The husband protested his innocence; his pantomime indicated that the valuables were in her handbag, which was a villainous misstatement of the facts.

"Now, boys," said Sennett, "we've got to devise a way of getting the jewels from the husband on the roof to the wife on the ground without her knowledge."

Del Ruth said: "Why not have him slide the jewels down the rainspout and into her bag? You can hang the purse on the other end."

"That's it," said Sennett, beaming on Del Ruth. "What business are you in?"

"My name's Del Ruth. I've been working for you the last five weeks."

"Is that so?" said Sennett, brevetting him on the field. "Well, from now on you're my scenario editor."

After Del Ruth won his spurs as an editor, he wanted to become a director, but Sennett vetoed that ambition. When the editor threatened to quit, Mack raised his salary. Del Ruth tore up his contracts five times in two years. On each occasion Sennett gave him a salary increase and a new contract calling for three years' service at \$1,750 a week.

Finally, Del Ruth issued an ultimatum. "I'm going to quit unless you give me a chance to direct a picture."

"Very well, then," said Sennett, "go ahead and direct."

Del Ruth waited for two weeks for his assignment. Sennett kept saying: "Don't be impatient. We're working on a continuity for you."

Del Ruth fidgeted, but Sennett would not yield a story. Del Ruth learned from his former underlings in the scenario department that they were working on a vehicle for Charlie Murray, but couldn't agree on details concerning the locale.

After another two weeks of dilly-dallying, Del Ruth went to Sennett and said: "Well, what's holding up the Murray story? I understand it's about a plumber. A plumber naturally has a place of business. But your story geniuses can't seem to find a shop for him. Do you mind if, while they are

getting his shop ready, I take a picture of the plumber's home life? I would like to give him a wife and two or three children. By the time I get this taken care of, they will undoubtedly have a place for the plumber to work."

"Go ahead and try it," said Sennett.

Del Ruth began. He had the plumber's wife take in washing—the plumber being a lazy artisan. The children were continually around the yard. The clothesline was strung on one of those circular, revolving affairs, and the youngsters used it for a merry-go-round.

After another two weeks, Mr. Del Ruth suddenly was informed that the scenario department at last had the plumber story ready. When Del Ruth relayed this scenario to Sennett, Mack said:

"Wait a minute. You've shot enough film as it is, and we don't need the new story."

So, *Riley's Wash Day*, with Charlie Murray, came into being. At the end of Del Ruth's picture, the plumber went downstairs to investigate a leak—his first professional move during the entire performance. The pipes blew up, and the fadeout saw Murray hanging on a chandelier. The plumber never completed his job.

When Del Ruth reported that he had completed the comedy, Sennett said: "Oh, no. We must have a chase for the finale. I'll have somebody else make it."

"Well," said Del Ruth, "I went out and photographed a

story while waiting for the scenario, and I think I'm entitled to finish it. You haven't even looked at my picture."

"Just keep calm," said Sennett, "and go sleep some place while we take the chase."

Del Ruth became so enraged that he kicked Sennett's wire waste basket across the room. This was an act of *lèse-majesté*, especially since it was committed in the presence of the gagmen. Sennett's face purpled. Del Ruth wanted to run, but knew his career as a dignified director was at an end if he did so. He walked with tragic grandeur to the door, turned and released the following polysyllabic blast:

"My dear Mr. Sennett. Before severing my ungodly connection with this noisome galley, I welcome the opportunity to deliver my valedictory in the reeking presence of your adulterous sycophants, and . . ."

"Stop!" cried the King. "I won't have such dirty language in my establishment."

". . . my dear Mr. Sennett, let me amplify. You are an unmitigated *Carcharodon* preying among bewildered shrimps. My erudite confrères will comprehend this piscatorial allusion. And in conclusion, my dear Mr. Sennett, you may take all the emoluments and perquisites of office and . . ."

"Get out!" roared the infuriated ex-boiler maker. "And don't come back shooting off your mouth like that around here."

The slamming door cut off Del Ruth's gracious adieu. Sennett suffered a lingual paralysis. He gesticulated in the

manner of his best pantomimists. His meaning was clear. Abdul hastened to pour him a stiff drink. The tonic restored the use of his vocal cords.

"Del Ruth's poor mother," he moaned cryptically. "His poor, poor mother!"

It was not long, however, before Del Ruth was reinstated as an editor. The little *contretemps* was forgotten under the pressure of a new enterprise—a feature-length comedy. While the picture was in the formative stage, Del Ruth received an urgent message from the Los Angeles Athletic Club. Would he come over at once?

Del Ruth interrupted a pleasant social engagement to answer the Sennett summons. Arrived at the Club the editor began at once to outline revised situations for the picture.

Mack raised his hand in interruption. "To hell with all that. I was writing a letter to a girl in New York, and I wanted you to give me a lot of big words."

Del Ruth never allowed his judgment to be clouded by his playwright's aversion to the meretriciousness of Hollywood's products. He saw in Sennett a man of exceptional resources and regarded him as an executive of the highest order. He esteemed his judgment of the public's taste in amusement. The means may have offended the dramatist's sensibilities, but he had to acknowledge that the results provoked unrestrained mirth in the millions. Once he told Sennett:

"Your success lies mainly in your ability to write just up to the public's mental capacity. I think you are quite justified in continuing to do so."

The next day a framed sign appeared on the wall of the scenario department. From the internal evidence, it represented the sweat of Sennett's brow.

"Remember: The extent of intelligence of the average public mind is eleven years. Moving pictures should be made accordingly."

The scenario department was always a thorn in the King's flesh. Nothing would induce its personnel to discipline themselves, and all the efforts Sennett had made in that direction were wasted. None of the discipline was aimed at the moral behavior of his charges. It was designed solely to promote industry. Sennett could never fully understand why talent recognizes no office hours.

As long as their overseer was present, the gag-men were visibly engaged in strenuous cerebration. Once his back was turned, they resumed their innocent pastimes—dicing, drinking, or promenading the primrose paths of nearby groves.

Once when Sennett needed an emergency gag for a lagging comedy reel, he and Al McNeil entered the scenario bungalow. Not a writer was on duty. The entire staff were walking on the shores of Silver Lake, a mile or so away. There wasn't a scrap of paper to be found on which to leave a damning reprimand. There were, however, some empty

bottles. Sennett wrote a note on a label and set the flask on Editor Del Ruth's desk. He then decided to move his scriveners nearer to the throne-room, to prevent mid-afternoon truancies.

Sennett installed the writers in a pent-house on the roof of the administration building. He had to climb thirteen stair-steps to reach this cubicle. To make sure that they would hear him approaching, the crap-shooting and guzzling gagsmen had the carpenter add an extra inch to the tread of the top step. Mack continually stumbled over this hurdle, wondering what might be wrong with his feet.

Sennett was the first producer to have a restaurant in a picture studio. He restricted the writers to one tuna-fish sandwich and a glass of milk at noon. Under no circumstances were the waiters permitted to serve meat to carnivorous authors.

"Eating heavy stuff makes writers logy," he said. "Then they go to sleep, or, if they do keep their eyes open, they don't know what they're talking about. They work on one story in the morning, then go eat. And when they come back, they're so pregnant they don't know what story they've been working on, so they stall and pick up another story."

The scriveners were obliged by edict to nibble their lunches on the lot. To get to the dining-room one had to climb a dark, winding flight of stairs. About every fourth stair was absent entirely.

Writers are a hungry tribe—by tradition, by force of cir-

cumstances and by congenital gastric disposition—so Sennett served “tea” in the afternoons, lest the boys die of starvation. This meager tiffin came at four o’clock. He advanced the service to four-thirty, then to four-forty-five and, finally, to five o’clock. After the Sennett samovar had done its duty, he would announce:

“Well, now that we’ve eaten, we can go ahead and work some more.”

In this way, he sometimes would keep the crew busy until about nine o’clock in the evening, unless, of course, he had a romantic engagement.

Sennett one day discovered that some of his emaciated hacks were sneaking into a restaurant across the street. It was operated by Katie, mother of one of the Keystone Cops. It was a combination restaurant, saloon and pool hall. Sennett was wroth at this competition and alimentary seduction. He ordered a list of names made of those who had flouted his rules concerning lunch.

Whenever Sennett desired to rid his premises of offensive employes, he tried to avoid the sad task of firing them in person. His studio manager, John Waldron, also was chary of dismissal scenes. A victim’s job sometimes lasted a month longer than it might have, due to the elaborate efforts of the studio owner and the manager to shift the onus of expulsion to each other. They finally devised a scheme to save them from delay and distress. When the sack-destined person ar-



rived at the studio entrance on a Monday, the watchman greeted him with the remark:

"No admittance—you finished Saturday night."

Professor Rob Wagner, exponent of Greek physical and mental culture, was one of the Sennett employes to receive a sad message at the gate. Wagner was a pioneer gag-man. Sennett had tried time and again to reform the professor, to no avail. The learned Rob committed the cardinal sin of sleeping two hours after lunch every noon. A curtailment of the professor's diet failed to remedy his Morphean lapses. He had moved an old couch from a picture set to the gag-room, and used it for his slumbers. He maintained that these siestas re-charged his batteries and made his mind twice as valuable when he woke up for the afternoon conferences.

"I can't see the point of that," Sennett said. "We'll have no couches here."

His bed confiscated, Wagner went to a second-hand store and purchased a folding cot. He brought it to the studio one Saturday and took a nap. The following Monday the watchman halted the professor at the gate and confided to him:

"No admittance—you finished Saturday night."

Mack made his men feel self-conscious when they quit work, even though it was time to go home. When the gag-men passed his office on their way out at 5:30 in the evening, Sennett always had his door open, the better to scrutinize his departing peons. When they tried to sneak out be-

fore the stipulated hour, Mack would invariably look at his watch, then glower at the slinkers and return his timepiece to his pocket without saying a word.

Also, about once every four months, Sennett would take up sentry duty at the studio gate at six o'clock in the morning and stand there, watch in hand, to inspect everyone who entered. The men never knew when this painful ceremony might occur.

Sennett would come to the gag-room early each afternoon, and although the men often had a complete story ready, they would give him only a portion of it and save the rest until the five-o'clock-tea conference. This meant they could invite their souls during the afternoon.

Mack allowed no telephones, newspapers, books, cards, or other recreational devices in the gag-room. He often tried to catch his pupils at these distractions, but never succeeded. He even put on gum-shoes and for once remembered the precarious top step. The gag-men had been forewarned of his sleuthing intent. When Mack arrived, he found his serfs in an excited huddle, and they pretended not to know he was at the door. One of them was saying:

"What really caused your uncle's death?"

Another gag-man answered: "It was a strange case, but doctors say there's an epidemic of it. You see, Uncle Rodney always wore rubber heels. It seems that any kind of rubber worn on the shoes causes an incurable disease called Spinal Rigor Mortis. The newspapers don't dare print the facts be-

cause, if they did, the manufacturers of rubber goods would jerk their ads right out of the papers. Poor Uncle Rodney! He had so much to live for! So young, too!"

Sennett straightway retired to his office and threw his gum-shoes into the wire waste basket.

Sennett had a habit of sitting with his head in his hands while he asked questions. He would then peer through his fingers, firm in the belief that his corporals did not know he was looking at them from behind this digital barricade.

Men new to the gag-room often mistook his behind-the-fan posture as one of approval and frequently talked themselves out of a job.

Felix Adler, a comedy expert, recommended a friend to Sennett as a potentially great gag-man. This fellow had been a cartoonist.

"Sennett has agreed to hire you," Felix told his friend. "Now take my advice and during a conference, no matter what happens, keep your mouth shut. Just go through the motions of thinking, but be sure to stay as silent as the tomb."

This fellow followed Felix's instructions, and so mournfully taciturn did he seem that Sennett thought him a font of wisdom. In fact, Mack took to addressing his best ideas to the silent fellow, as though he were the Sphinx and held the answers to all life's riddles. Sennett inquired concerning

Felix's protégé and learned that he had a widowed mother and a house that was heavily mortgaged.

Several weeks elapsed and the ex-cartoonist had not opened his mouth in conference. Then, one fateful day, he leaped to his feet and all eyes turned to him with a startled expression. Sennett was ready for a message from an oracle.

"I know exactly what to do in this story, Mr. Sennett," said the former pen-and-ink proletarian. "The villain has a great big knife and chases Beery down the deck. Beery dashes into the cabin and locks the door!"

Sennett waited for the rest of the divine utterance. "Yes? Now what does he do with the knife?"

Mr. Adler's hitherto-reticent friend replied: "Mr. Sennett, that's for *you* to figure out."

Sennett started for the door. "There goes your mortgage, your house, and your poor old mother, right out in the street. You fixed that."

Sennett regarded certain trifling flaws in a picture as important, but sometimes refused to remedy what seemed to others to be major defects. For example, in the Chaplin picture, *Shoulder Arms*, there was a scene which showed Chaplin carrying a musket. The next moment, the gun was missing from Chaplin's shoulder. Immediately afterward the gun mysteriously appeared again. When this anachronism was called to Sennett's attention, he said:

"We'll not re-shoot or re-cut the scene. The public and

myself regard Chaplin as a genius. We are watching him and are absorbed in what he is doing. We are not worried about what the gun is doing. If what Mr. Chaplin is enacting is not funny enough or great enough to cover all mistakes in costume, props or background, we should scrap the picture entirely and fire Mr. Chaplin. In this case we'll not re-shoot it, and we won't fire Mr. Chaplin."

As with every child, the motion picture is the result of a collaboration. The first natural marriage of cinematic minds brought about the polygamous union of producer, director and author. Subsequently the common-law relationship among screen writers attained sanction by its fruit. Their collaboration became desirable and indispensable. Keystone was first to encourage the mating of quasi-literary minds.

Three pioneers in the field of collaboration were Ray Griffith, Johnny Grey and Albert Glassmyer. These Keystone veterans survived campaigns that left the field strewn with bleeding Shakespeares. The history of slap-stick would be mournful, indeed, if the exploits of this triumvirate were ignored. They were experts in keeping their balance while twirling a fantastic world at vertiginous speed. Their tongues in their cheeks, they could watch the spectacle with the impassiveness of a dreamy yogi and the scorn of a Caligula.

Ray Griffith had appeared in several Sennett pictures. Dissatisfied with his progress as a comedian, Griffith paid the Keystone janitor ten cents a day to perform a sly service.

Whenever Sennett approached the comedians' dressing room, he found the porter convulsed in laughter.

"Mr. Sennett, I can't help it," he articulated between spasms. "That man Griffith is so funny. So awful funny!"

Suspicious, Sennett investigated. He disregarded Griffith's comic antics entirely. But he paid \$5 for the idea behind them.

Unable to impress Sennett with his pantomime, Griffith took his talent to Fox Studios. After a short season there, he quarreled with a director and left for New York.

When Del Ruth finally resigned, and meant it, Sennett needed a new scenario editor. Mack's selective and lucky memory pounced on Griffith and the five-dollar sale.

Griffith reported at Keystone to find no wheels turning. Ford Sterling had gone. Charlie Chaplin had joined Essanay for the tremendous salary of \$1,250 a week. Several other comedians, stimulated by the Chaplin windfall, had struck for higher wages. And when Del Ruth had quit, Sennett climbed out of his bath, dressed, and went roaring through the lot, shouting defiantly:

"Quit! All of you. You think you made me what I am? I'll show you. I can get up my own stories, build my own sets, photograph and direct my own pictures, and act the lead in them, too. Quit and be damned!"

Griffith labored under the impression that Keystone had engaged him as a comedian. They talked over a story idea, and Sennett said: "That's the stuff. Now go to work."

"Shall I use the old make-up?" asked Griffith.

Sennett blinked. "Hell, no. I don't even remember your make-up. I can hire actors and directors by the dozen. You're more valuable to me as a writer. I can take property men and make directors out of them, but where in hell can I get writers? You can't buy brains—they're not for sale. You've got to find them and bring them in."

"I'll try to do the job," said Griffith.

Fortunately for Griffith, Director Dick Jones was mapping out a story upon which Griffith had worked elsewhere. How it had migrated to the Sennett lot, Griffith never knew. He began to bubble with ideas. Jones was astonished. Sennett was overjoyed. By the caprices of the Hollywood gods, Griffith, the comedian, became Mr. Griffith, the editor.

Johnny Grey, the second of the three Sennett "literary" aces, was one of the wittiest citizens ever to dabble with celluloid. Besides, he was the finest title writer in the business. Keystone was the trail blazer in this field. Whenever the action lagged, or a new sequence needed a preface, a writer would compose a "leader." At Keystone, they were in the nature of jokes, and sometimes Grey's titles were so good that whole pictures were built around them. The vogue of captions proved contagious, and other companies, which produced straight or dramatic pictures, began to hire flowery word-tossers or smart-cracking writers, men like Ralph Spence and H. M. ("Beanie") Walker.

Grey was the son of a Brooklyn saloon keeper who wanted Johnny to study law. To please his ambitious parent, and for no other reason whatsoever, Grey completed a law course and served an apprenticeship in the office of Abe Hummell, the notorious New York barrister who afterward was disbarred.

All this time, Johnny wanted to go on the stage. He finally played the juvenile in *The Christian*. Grey had a naturally pleasant voice and his training as a lawyer and an actor heightened the effectiveness of his tones and diction.

This charming little man was forty-nine years old when he moved his whiskey bottles to the Sennett lot. Mack's prohibitions in regard to drinking on the premises were elastic when applied to writers. He saw early that he could not enforce a rule of abstinence during working hours. You may take away an author's bread, burn his works in the public square, throw him in jail for splitting an infinitive or drive him out of town for lampooning the mayor, but no mortal can tell him when and if he should drink, or where.

Grey also had his own ideas concerning office hours. Headmaster Sennett once reprimanded him before his peers for chronic and incurable tardiness. Johnny answered:

"My God! They don't pay a horse just for the little time it takes him to get round the track. They don't pay Ty Cobb only for the time he wins a ball game. It isn't time that they get paid for. It's performance."



Sennett said: "You don't think that you're a horse or Ty Cobb, do you?"

"No," said Mr. Grey. "I don't sleep in a stable or wear a uniform."

Sennett wanted to make a burlesque of the motion picture, *The Three Musketeers*. It was Johnny Grey's suggestion. Sennett had an inspiration.

"We'll call it the *Four Musketeers*," he said.

"You can't do that and stick to literary facts," said Grey. "There were only three musketeers."

"The hell you say," Sennett remarked. "I saw the picture and I distinctly recall there were four fellows always fighting, and not three."

"Three of them," said Grey, "were musketeers. And the other fellow was d'Artagnan."

"I can count as well as you can. There were four of them," Sennett insisted, "and, what is more, none of them had muskets."

The third member of this writing-group was Albert Glassmyer. He had been a music critic on a Philadelphia newspaper. He liked to argue the superiority of chamber music over symphonic music, and reminisce of his friendship with the New York critic, James Gibbons Huneker. Glassmyer was a retiring, self-effacing fellow, until drunk or until someone asked: "Who the hell was Huneker?"

When America entered the World War, Johnny Grey in-

sisted that Glassmyer change his name to the French spelling, Pierre Glassmière. So he went to bed one night a German Lutheran and woke up next morning an Alsatian Catholic. Griffith and Grey called Glassmyer "Mr. Beamish," and always referred to him in this manner in his presence, as though he weren't there at all.

Grey was a liberal spender and was usually in debt. Glassmyer was frugal and had a bank account. One day in a restaurant, Grey became annoyed at his colleague's tight-fisted predilection and shouted:

"God damn it, why doesn't Mr. Beamish ever pick up the check?"

"It's prenatal influence," Glassmyer said. "The day before I was born my dear mother was frightened by a rent collector."

Glassmyer's thrift enabled him to build a bungalow court. When it had been finished, it was quickly filled with families of many children. One day a gentleman with dark glasses appeared at the court and presented all the children with colored crayons. He explained to the mothers that he was popularizing a new kind of pencil, and that these were samples.

The results were horrifying to Glassmyer and the mothers. The children scrawled all over the walls, doors and sidewalks. A shocked mother looked at the colored chalk marks and said: "I didn't think my little Arthur knew those words!"

Glassmyer drank a bottle of whiskey and began to plan the slaying of Johnny Grey. He rightly surmised that Grey had been the man in dark glasses and had played this joke to punish him for his frugality.

The Griffith-Grey-Glassmyer team worked in this manner: Griffith composed the story. Glassmyer brought in gags, old and new, and Grey titled the comedies. After they had agreed on a story-line, Griffith acted as spokesman, and recited it to Sennett. He was highly successful in this rôle. He acted out the plot, and emphasized the gags by writhing with laughter, crouching, leaping and bucking beneath the load of mirth.

When new writers arrived, it was their habit to play "lone wolf." They usually were suspicious of the Fiddlers Three. The neophytes preferred to form their own stories and recite them to Sennett in person. They demanded private audience to insure full credit of authorship for themselves. They were usually fired after the first recital—certainly at the conclusion of the second.

Once a Harvard bachelor of arts got a job and was assigned to work with the three aces. They cautioned him to keep mum during conferences. After they had agreed on a plot, Grey took the scholar from the Charles River aside and said:

"Let Griffith tell the story and get it over with. After all, this is just a job and our main concern is the pay envelope—not a degree *cum laude*."

The four men called on Sennett to report progress. Before Griffith could swing into action, the son of John Harvard suddenly broke his moorings and went story-telling under full sail. His colleagues were marooned by the impulsive buccaneer. His narrative was entirely different from the one upon which they had agreed. It also was a much better story from every standpoint. Sennett listened for a while, then scowled and exploded:

"Lousy! Go back to Yale!"

The effervescent young man sat down, deflated. Griffith, after allowing the situation to die, said: "Now here, Mr. Sennett, how does this sound?"

He thereupon began to tell the very same story that the newcomer had recited, but acted it out, dressed it up a bit, put emphasis on the gags and, when he was finished, sat down. Sennett looked at the sunken academician and, with a withering grimace, said:

"There, now! That's more like it. We'll make *that one*."

It was Sennett's conviction that all comedy is based on tragedy. First you must have a dramatic, tragic story, then it must be transmuted into comedy. This procedure became a formula adopted by other producers, as in the following instance:

A woman has an illegitimate child in a charity hospital. When she has recovered from her ordeal, she departs from the hospital with her child. She is so filled by shame that she

decides to leave the baby with someone who will give it proper care. After that, she will commit suicide.

On her way through the streets she sees an automobile. It is an expensive one, and she thinks that its owner must be well able to give her child the kind of home she cannot make for it. She places the child in the tonneau of the automobile and departs for the river. As she passes through a park on the river-bank, a child is playing beside its nurse. The child catches hold of the woman's skirt, and suddenly her maternal instinct obliterates all thoughts of disgrace or death. She runs back to get her child from the automobile, but the machine has been driven away.

She is frantic. She prepares to devote the rest of her life to a search for her baby. She gets employment in the theater. She becomes a great actress. But all the money and fame which she wins mean nothing to her. She thinks only of her child.

This story emerged as one of the funniest pictures ever made. It was Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid*. By it he earned a million dollars in royalties. It introduced Jackie Coogan to the screen. Although Chaplin was the star, there was no mention of a grown-up man in the original outline of the tragedy.

When he saw how clever his boys were at concocting titles, Sennett tested their talents on matters not pertaining to stories or pictures. He wanted a name for the new dress-

ing rooms he had erected for the women stars. The Fiddlers Three knocked off work and went into a huddle for two days. Finally, Mr. Sennett dismissed the idea when Grey said:

"Let's call the ladies' quarters 'Shad Row.'"

On another occasion, Sennett thought the village of Edendale should be re-named. He had been instrumental in the up-building of the community. His studio now contained many wonders. He had built a huge enclosed stage, the first of its kind. This structure had concrete piers and steel struts and beams, to hold the muslin diffusers. He had also begun the first night pictures in motion-picture history. Mack Swain had been summoned from bed one evening to try out the lights—not because Mack was the leading comedian, but because he lived nearest to the Edendale plant. After the picture had been taken, Swain went home with Hollywood's first case of Klieg eyes.

Sennett now had a million dollars. It was invested in Edendale property and in bonds. He would not put any money in the bank. He justly considered himself a "personage," and if Tom Ince could have a community named after him, Inceville, why shouldn't Sennett enjoy a similar distinction?

The Fiddlers Three "caught on" the moment the King of Comedy mentioned "re-naming Edendale." They knew it was a great chance to have a week's lay-off from the story

grind. They conferred daily with Sennett regarding proposals for Edendale's re-christening.

Grey suggested "Sennettville," as a good name.

"No," said Glassmyer. "It sounds like a hick town. I don't like 'ville' in anything. Too small."

Sennett nodded sagely. He didn't want his name to be connected with anything tiny. Let Ince have his "Inceville."

"I have a suggestion," said Griffith. "We should call it Sennett City."

Mack wasn't sure that this was a suitable name, but Griffith began to go through a dramatic routine. He got to his feet.

"Why," he orated, "the newspapers will eat it up. Suppose a child is hit by a street car." Mr. Griffith fell to the floor to imitate a mangled urchin. He continued his harangue from the horizontal position. "Why, every newspaper will come out with headlines: 'Tiny Tot Crushed by Sennett City Street Car.' " Mr. Griffith got off the floor, still full of oratory. "And suppose there is a murder here." He began to stagger and hold his heart as though shot. "The newspapers will say: 'Man Slain by Jealous Mistress in Sennett City.' See? Your name everywhere, and connected not with 'Sennettville,' or 'Sennetton,' or 'Sennettberg,' but with 'Sennett City,' a metropolis."

Mr. Sennett went toward the door. "I'll let you know tomorrow," he said.

He never mentioned the matter again. Perhaps he forgot

it. Or, as his aides surmised, perhaps he had not taken into consideration the fact that the city officials had something to say about changing the name of a suburb.

Mack's building program included the construction of an elaborate restaurant. He called his Fiddlers Three into conference and said:

"I want you to think up a name for the new restaurant."

Once again the boys knocked off all other work and pretended to be engrossed in the new problem. They reported with many suggestions, taking care to proffer titles which they felt Sennett would veto. They wanted as much time for loafing as possible.

Griffith proposed "The Café Comique." Glassmyer suggested: "The Sennetteria." So far as Sennett was concerned, his restaurant was the first and only one of its kind in the world. He explained.

"I've got a great plan. Now, we know that a fellow comes home from work awfully tired and cross. And if he finds his wife tired and cross, and his house smelling of food, it makes him think of getting a divorce. Now suppose, instead of all this, it would be possible for these husbands and wives to say: 'Honey, let's go over to Mack Sennett's restaurant'—or whatever the name is to be?"

"Do you mean," asked Grey, "that we're going to have a lot of yokels coming in here to eat?"

"They're not yokels," said Sennett. "They are self-respecting citizens."



"They couldn't be self-respecting if they wanted to come in here," said Grey.

Mack reproved him sententiously. "They are part of our public. They not only would see how pictures are made, but would get something to eat and a cup of coffee."

Grey got up. "I've got it. Let's call it 'Mack's Coffee Cuppe'!"

The conference was adjourned. The next day an unembellished sign appeared over the door of the commissary: "Restaurant."

There was an exposition at San Diego and the Chamber of Commerce asked the Los Angeles picture magnates to help make it a success. In partnership with Ince, Sennett purchased a large captive balloon. The two friends joined forces to show visitors to San Diego how motion pictures were made, and then let them purchase tickets for a ride in the balloon.

Business was so slow that Sennett and Ince asked their stars to visit San Diego on Sundays to act as "shillabers." When the populace did not rush into the Sennett-Ince exhibit, Gloria Swanson, Wallace Beery, Arbuckle and others would fight their way through the crowd to shout: "Hey, mister, give me ten tickets for the balloon ride."

After the exposition, Sennett wondered what had happened to the balloon. Ince pretended he did not know, but Sennett's sleuths discovered the gas-bag stored in one of the

property warehouses at Inceville. When Mack broached the subject, Ince said:

"I didn't know it was there, but you can borrow it any time you need it."

Sennett borrowed it to play a joke on Johnny Grey. Johnny had been drinking and was sure to be absent from home until late that night. Sennett and his aides put the balloon in his apartment. Then, through a window, they inflated it from a compressed-air machine until the bag bulged and filled the apartment. When Grey came from the saloon, he was unable to open his door, because the full-blown balloon prevented. A puzzled landlord summoned the police, who thought themselves suddenly gone daft.

The placement of unusual and large objects in Grey's room became a pastime among his friends. On his fiftieth birthday, he went home to find in his living room a ten-horse plough. It had been dismantled, taken piece by piece into the Grey home, and there re-assembled at the order of Ray Griffith.

Grey figured out how much Sennett's income was and reduced it to terms of cents per minute. Whenever Sennett came in to bawl out the staff, Grey would bring out his watch. Once after the "Old Man" had gone, Grey said: "Well, that cost him just \$11.40."

Had Sennett thought in these business-efficiency terms, he might have curtailed his tirades. The practice of small economies had become a phobia with him. Although he would in-

vest \$10,000 in a single gag, he resented having the swimming pool filled too often. It cost \$12.

Sennett's three gag-men pretended to be ashamed to take credit for anything they had concocted for Keystone pictures. When anyone asked: "Who wrote that picture?" Grey would reply with hasty loyalty: "Mr. Sennett. He writes them all."

The gag-men were on the alert to learn when sweethearts in the troupe were having quarrels. Whenever this happened, the Fiddlers Three would work laboriously to figure out scenes where the disgruntled lovers would have a great deal of embracing and kissing. Then the trio would sit on the sidelines to study the amatory reactions of people who hated each other.

One of the titles written by Griffith for Ben Turpin concerned a situation in which Turpin shot his inamorata's husband, in her presence, saying: "Don't look, sweetheart. You can read it in the papers tomorrow!" For a picture in which the wife was slain by her sweetie, he wrote: "Your wife's in there with the undertaker," and in another opus, dealing with homicide, had a gentleman say to his mistress: "I hate murder. It's so hard to explain."

The Griffith-Grey-Glassmyer combination turned out thirty-six comedies their first year. Their product was so good that Sennett gave them more money and increased their schedule. He at last consented to let them get some of their ideas down on paper, but thought it best if they dictated to a secretary.

The first secretary allotted to the screen writers was a girl. Sennett *had* to get rid of her. His men could not speak their minds while addressing a lady.

The first male secretary, called "Judge," had been a court stenographer. During the five years he listened to and recorded gags, no one ever saw him laugh. He always seemed amazed when he heard Sennett say: "That's right. That's funny." He would look up to see if everybody had not gone suddenly mad. Nobody ever asked his opinion concerning anything.

A second secretary, Lew Arlen, had a fine sense of humor. He was not a boisterous fellow, but could be funny on occasion. The Fiddlers Three liked him particularly because he would let them see the boss's mail. Sennett sometimes wondered how his brilliant gag-men kept so well informed.

Mack Sennett made the first motion-picture satire on itself. It was called *A Small Town Idol* and antedated *Merton of the Movies* and all other stories and stage-plays dealing with the screen. It was a great hit. It was the story of a rural lad's entry into the movies and his rise. Ben Turpin was the star, and Johnny Grey wrote a title for a scene showing Turpin in a church praying to heaven to send him light. While Turpin kneeled the window fell on him, and the title read:

"Either Heaven has heard me, or the window needs fixing."

In another scene of the same picture, Turpin is portrayed as a mob runs him out of town. The mob leader has a rope, with which to hang the cross-eyed comedian. Grey's title for this scene was :

"This may be for the best, but I doubt it."

Sennett was so stirred when he saw the rushes for one scene of *The Small Town Idol*, in which Turpin was being taken by the mob up a hill, a rope about his neck, that he likened it to Calvary. He was much annoyed when the Fiddlers Three crossed themselves every time this part of the picture was shown. Sennett was deeply religious.

When critics saw *The Small Town Idol* their adjectives were fulsome. One of them likened Sennett to Molière. This clipping pleased Sennett no little, but he brought the criticism to Johnny Grey and asked : "Who is this fellow Moly-something?"

Griffith interposed : "Molière was a smart French plagiarist who hired three men to do his thinking for him."

## *Chapter 20*

### ALL THE KING'S HORSES

**T**HE Molière of the silver sheet solemnly and abruptly revealed to his cabinet a grandiose plan to invade the province of serious photo-drama. He commanded his bonnie lads temporarily to cease piping the jig and take up the fanfare of melodrama. Nothing less would satisfy him than a tear-drenched masterpiece designed to rival the celluloid sobs of da Vinci Griffith and the commercial war-whoops of Rodin Ince.

When the ministers heard this grave pronunciamento, they sought for the usual occult meanings in the wizard's mumbo-jumbo. Accustomed to Sennett's oblique practices, the stewards of the comic cauldron were slow to accept his weird recipe. They were a bit uneasy about the whole business.

Apparently their indefatigable Merlin was contemplating some new way of deploying on the stronghold of mirth. They waited for enlightenment.

As days passed and the King of Comedy continued to make manifest the architectonics of his dramatic scheme, his harried subjects wondered if he were not in the grip of a delusion of grandeur. At length they arrived at the sad conclusion that the monarch of the clowns himself was bitten by that insidious bug which stings so many comedians. Once nipped by this insect, Pagliacci spends his off-stage hours in daffy introspection and weeps to think upon the irreparable loss the world sustains because he does not play the tragedian. Even in the skull of Yorick there seems to linger the dream of playing the Hamlet rôle.

The veteran retainers at Keystone had learned never to seem startled by King Mack's sudden whimsies. When he decided to exchange sock for buskin, the gag-men began at once to commune with the tragic muse. The title, *Heart Balm*, was chosen for the first of Sennett's emotional dramas. The best minds of the Keystone faculty evolved a heroine who loved not wisely but too well. They concocted a lachrymose theme. Their leading lady had no alternative; her choice lay between disgrace as a paid mattress-fiend or vindication from her betrayer who must stand and deliver. Sennett scrutinized every ingredient that went into this witch's brew. He was doubly solemn, in or out of his bath, and went about his work with the manner of a Booth—the one who

shot Lincoln. During these days of gestation, he stood at his Tower window and gazed glumly on his empire.

Some jaundiced critics said that his window-staring was not entirely due to the creative and tragic mood. He was having a foundation built for a dynamo, and it was whispered that he espied upon the artisans to learn whether they were giving their best. It was war time, and skilled labor was otherwise conscripted. Sennett had taken the trouble to ascertain how many bricks a mason should set per day. He was told that a workman usually laid eight hundred bricks a day for a wall, four hundred for a fireplace or twelve hundred for a foundation.

"Well, this is a foundation," he said, as he returned to his conferences over *Heart Balm*.

While the Sennett pundits were wrangling over a point of this tear-stained plot, their chief stood at his window. He answered all questions without turning his eyes from the power-house site. His uninterrupted mumbling indicated something or other.

At five o'clock that evening the brick mason dropped his trowel a split-second after the town whistles began to blow workmen's taps. Sennett turned from his window.

"Abdul, catch that fake bricklayer at the gate, and tell him he is fired. He laid only eight hundred and sixty-two bricks the whole damned day. I counted 'em."

With the arrival of a new and nimbler mason, Sennett plunged again into *Heart Balm* and finished it. He was ef-



fervescently pleased with Johnny Grey's flowery titles, although he objected to one which described a sunrise as "the diffusing glow that comes over the mellow fields of old Castile."

"Take that out," said Sennett. "It sounds too much like soap."

There were psychic vibrations in the air as Sennett made ready to pre-view his dramatic opus. To lend an aura of dignity, he invited the veteran theatrical producer, Daniel Frohman, to attend the unveiling ceremonies. On their way to the theater, Sennett and Frohman spoke of art. Mack confided his ambitions in respect to screen culture. Inside the playhouse, Frohman took a seat at Sennett's right hand. The host kept bombarding the noted impresario with facts concerning the æsthetic significance of *Heart Balm*. The lights died down and the picture was begun.

Less than fifty feet of *Heart Balm* had been unwound when the audience commenced to shriek. These convulsed folk thought Sennett's grimly conceived tale one of the funniest yet to emerge from the Keystone cornucopia. Sennett was startled. The world's leading dealer in the commodity of mirth had never been misled by such a furore. Here was genuine laughter.

Mr. Frohman, as deeply embarrassed as Sennett, groped in the semi-darkness for Sennett's clenched hand and shouted above the tumult of laughter:

"I congratulate you on a very telling satire on American customs."

Artistically bruised but commercially alert, Dr. Sennett removed his *Heart Balm* to the clinic. At first he was inclined to let the patient die. Professional ethics and potential profits, however, convinced him that such a procedure would constitute gross and criminal malpractice. He who had been so unerring in his judgment of audience response to comedy now was puzzled at his failure to estimate the public's reaction to heart-tugging drama. Reluctantly he determined to purge *Heart Balm* and rehabilitate it as a comedy.

He renamed his picture *The Crossroads of New York*. He instructed Johnny Grey to write comedy titles to supplant the bombastic captions which had convulsed the audience at the première. He had McNeil eliminate certain of the tearful, and by far the funniest, scenes. And right here the hitherto infallible King of Comedy made a grave mistake. The doctored tragedy, released as a comedy, failed.

Sennett, however, never entirely relinquished a conviction that he could have made screen history in the mirthless field. He began to produce educational pictures as a side-line.

His earlier ventures in the "educational" milieu had been the result of commercial emergencies. As mentioned before, when a comedy was cut to two hundred and fifty feet, he had to fill in with another two hundred and fifty feet of "something." The Zuni Indians and the tuna-fish canneries had been among these inescapable program-padders.

The sight of big fish had led Mack to become a devotee of deep-sea angling. This sportsman's interest, together with the importance of tuna fish in cans, led Sennett to contemplate a series of nautical epics. He bought a condemned brig, *Hermia*, which had been standing for five years in San Pedro harbor. Only his most intrepid photographers and actors would sail on this decayed tub. The gag-men called it *Hernia*. Wives of Sennett's principals lived through weeks of anxiety while their loved ones were adrift at sea, cavorting on the buckled decks of this barnacle-draped hulk. Finally the government inspectors decided to save Sennett's crew from themselves. They took measures to forbid *Hermia's* educational cruises. Mack hired a proctor in admiralty to thwart official action. The issue was settled by Neptune himself. As though broken in spirit, as she most certainly was in keel, bulkhead and prow, senile *Hermia* dipped her posterior low in the tide, sank fifty fathoms under and sat in the seaweed gardens of Davy Jones. Fortunately no Keystone educators were aboard at the time—else the world would have had to suffer another submarine epic.

Undaunted by *Hermia's* loss, Sennett purchased a yacht, hired divers and spent a fortune on under-sea pictures. He became the victim of salt-water charlatans. Anyone who smelled of bilge or walked with bow-legged mariner's rickets could sell himself to Skipper Sennett as a maritime author or actor. These aqueous projects were an educational success, but Mack's suffering of a sea change was costly. His public

preferred the skull-cracking forays of dizzy comedians to any duel between under-water vertebrates.

We have noted how the phoenix of comedy arose from tragic ashes during Sennett's story conferences. In consonance with that tragi-comic technique, Mack selected his players for particular rôles in a curious manner. If one of his actors or actresses was scheduled to play a certain part, Mack would pretend that some luminous star from another studio was to appear in the piece. This system of make-believe came to be known as "mythical casting."

Sennett would interrupt a story improvisation to ask: "Do you think this plot suits Mary Pickford?" or, "I can't quite see Francis X. Bushman in this part." Neither of these personages, of course, was remotely connected with Keystone. Sennett would mention other actors as though they were at his beck, whereas the Louise Glaums, Alice Joyces and Carlyle Blackwells were not to be had by him for any amount of money or effort.

The assembled gag-men were as solemn as Bond Street tailors whenever their chief designer measured his cloth for actors who never in God's world would wear the Keystone garments. If he asked, "Now, be frank. Do you think Theda Bara will give us a good performance?" the lieutenants partook of the pipe-dream as though their souls were at stake. Sometimes they were a nightmare ahead of Sennett in this fabulous game. If Ray Griffith were to say, "Just a minute;

we are getting away from Maurice Costello characterization," Sennett would look through his fingers and say: "Keep in bounds, boys. This is Maurice's picture."

During the evolution of *A Small Town Idol*, Sennett said: "Whoa! Can Wallace Reid do all the things we have in mind? What do *you* think, Glassmyer?"

The former Philadelphia music critic pondered, then said: "Reid can do it if he'll only put his heart in the rôle."

The other gag-men nodded sagely, knowing full well that Sennett's "Wallace Reid" was Keystone's cross-eyed Ben Turpin.

Despite this folderol, Sennett never supplied a conference-room alias for Mabel Normand. She was a striking exception to his "mythical casting" rule. He always spoke of her simply as Mabel Normand. A reverent light would come to his eyes, a quiet tone to his voice, when he mentioned her for a picture. In his heart she was the embodiment of every romantic character.

Few critics have disputed Mabel Normand's right to a special niche in the motion-picture hall of fame. There is, however, a divergence of opinion as to her exact artistic stature. The many-faceted personality of Mabel Normand obscured her few professional defects in the eyes of her own contemporaries.

Legends seldom can be depended upon for a completely fair or unbiased appraisal of character. A legend may be-

come encrusted with many implausible fictions. But at the core there must be truth, or the legend has no chance of survival. About the memory of Miss Normand there has grown a cluster of half-true and half-apocryphal stories which pay tribute to her courage, her generosity and her charm, or which besmirch her with calumny and disgrace. No attempt to find the core of truth at the center of the Normand legends can ignore the qualities which differentiate the woman from the actress. Even to herself, the real of life and the unreal of her medium seemed inseparably fused.

Miss Normand has been likened to Charlie Chaplin. Despite the environment of slap-stick with the Ford Sterling genre of muscular comedy, Mabel Normand had the inherent quality of Chaplin's grace of expression, his ability to represent pathos beneath the comic veneer. It is no slur on her craftsmanship to suggest that she lacked the masterly understatement which distinguished the performance of the Limehouse Garrick. Perhaps the fundamental difference between these gifted persons was that Mabel's irrepressible personality dominated her art, whereas Chaplin's consummate art towered above his personality and bent it to the will of genius.

These actors played opposite each other many times. Mabel's work always urged Chaplin to superlative efforts. He stole, in theatrical parlance, few scenes and fewer pictures from her without an exercise of his full abilities. It must be borne in mind, however, that Mabel entered these lists with

every advantage that Sennett could provide her, the best stories and the best directors. The boiler-factory Svengali jealously watched over his Trilby. She was his beloved as well as his star.

Denied an education, Mabel Normand naïvely imagined that the whole world thirsted, as she thirsted, for knowledge. With the acquisition of great wealth, the lack which she felt most keenly and sought to remedy was her lost opportunity for study. Books became a fetish with her, even though she groped through them without direction. Vicariously she fulfilled a desire for academic advantages by sending many girls to college.

Two factors combined to make Mabel's life a tragedy. She was loved at first sight by millions, and she elected to live her life openly and without apology for her impulses. She loved life too well to hide within the cloisters of art. She did not know that her millions of idolaters were as exacting as importunate lovers.

A weirdly powerful relationship, unspoken and unwritten, exists for a little day between the public and its stars. Many patrons of the motion picture look upon the dimes they drop into the box-office window as payment in full on a solemn contract for the right to control the private concerns of their screen favorites. Ostensibly, these patrons pay for entertainment. Implied in the bond, however, is a fantastic dream-marriage which makes an audience the spouse of someone they may never have seen in the third dimension. A fierce

jealousy rages. The public is Cæsar. His cinematic wife must be above suspicion.

The mass ownership of a celebrity makes of the star a queen bee. Obeisances are offered her; she is accorded royal rank, but is, withal, a prisoner in a hive. She has no privacy, and if she insists upon a life of her own, she is despised and rejected. When she chooses to remain in seclusion, she must suffer innuendo, which, if cast upon a woman in everyday life, would bring shotguns to the shoulders of the pious.

The mad desire of human beings to maul their idols has been described in all its pathological manifestations by crowd psychologists in terms of religious frenzy. Cases histories abound in the cinema.

There is a curiously sad implication in the fact that hundreds of thousands mourned the death of Marie Dressler. Yet, had she refused to permit the public to manhandle her with violent, loving embraces, to keep her standing for hours on aging and tired feet while a smile belied her knowledge that she was dying, this grand old trouser undoubtedly would have alienated many of her admirers.

Joan Crawford, stormed by worshippers, was almost undressed when she went for a "quiet" walk. She suffered indignities that would have put her molesters in the booby hatch, had she been a shop girl instead of a star.

The roof of Mary Pickford's taxicab was torn off by the tornado of public esteem in a New England town. America's



Sweetheart asked the press to say nothing about the incident, lest her screen lovers think that she was being untrue to them.

The world's record demonstration by movie zealots, however, occurred in La Belle France. The victim was Charlie Chaplin. After he had made his first million dollars, he went to Europe for a vacation. He slipped away from a Parisian hotel to wander incognito in an obscure district on the Left Bank. No one recognized him. He was happy. After all, there *was* some privacy, if one had the patience to seek it.

As he strolled along, Mr. Chaplin suffered an abdominal cramp. He inquired of an angelic porter where one might find a W.C. Mr. Chaplin knew no French and the porter knew no English. After some ineffectual parley in two languages, Chaplin became apprehensive. The stomach ache was now almost beyond control. He did some pantomime. He postured, grunted, wriggled and rolled his eyes to heaven. The porter was aghast. A madman loose in the Latin Quarter! Probably the third son of a dissipated earl. The porter fled.

Chaplin hastily tried all the resources of his art on a cab driver. This fellow was highly amused. He called to several of his confrères. They, too, watched the Chaplin contortions. Occasionally they applauded, as only the French can when reference is made to bedroom or bath. Several cocottes joined the throng. Chaplin was dismayed. Everyone believed his pantomime to be in the best traditions of the art.

Finally, and after Chaplin was ready to yield to the mercies of nature, a godsend, in the shape of a cheese vendor came from his shop doorway to ask Chaplin in English: "Do you want a job? You could draw in the customers, my amiable citizen."

Chaplin held his abdomen and gasped: "Not a job. A toilet."

The cheese vendor began to consider this problem. At this moment Chaplin unwittingly did a few desperate steps of his famous walk. The cheese vendor's eyes popped as he pointed at Chaplin and shouted: "Charlot! Charlot!"

It was a magic name. That and the walk enlightened everyone. The audience began to mob Chaplin. The cheese vendor, however, helped him to the backyard of his own store, where there stood a building fully as ornamental and useful as any of its Missouri cousins. Chaplin dashed for its hospitable seclusion, the mob at his heels. He barely succeeded in slamming the door and fastening it from the inside with an ancient wrought-iron hook.

By now he was unmindful of the great tumult outside, the hammering at the door and the shouts of "Charlot! Charlot!" But soon he was amazed to see the walls of the building fall. The front wall was first to go, what with a contingent of Latin Quarter admirers using a long wooden bench as a ram against the door. Then the wall on the port side collapsed. The starboard wall yielded next. Then the after-bulkhead went by the board with Chaplin barely escap-

ing the fate of the brave captain who goes down with his ship. The mob now began fighting and screaming among themselves. They wanted portions of the blessed ruins as souvenirs of the unprecedented occasion. A wine peddler with a great red beard gripped the door, but released it when struck by one of his own bottles. The hinges were pried off by a concierge, who consented, after a loud bargaining, to part with one hinge for fifty-three francs. The toilet seat had disappeared mysteriously. Amid cries of robbery, scandal, double-dealing, there were threats to lynch a suspect, a grape-louse exterminator from Gascony. Two urchins were having a tug-of-war with the wrought-iron hook. Their grandfather claimed they had stolen it from his pocket. He began to cane them.

During this fierce *mêlée*, Chaplin's stomach ache vanished. He managed to flee, just as a group of *grisettes* and their tough-looking escorts set upon him, presumably to confiscate his pants.

He decided never again to cross the Seine if there were the least symptom of undue peristalsis.

After Chaplin had deserted Keystone, Sennett patiently sought to develop a successor to the now-famous Englishman. In this, Mack resembled the fight manager who perennially hopes for the rise of "another Jack Dempsey," or the impresario who dreams of "another Caruso." Sennett de-

veloped many stars of importance, but "another Chaplin" is yet to be discovered.

He relied more and more on Mabel Normand. He exploited her, but she never faltered or complained. There was no hazard that frightened her. When Sennett said, "You'll dive from a ship's crow's nest into the ocean," she would not ask how high a crow's nest was, but would reply: "When do we do it, Mike?"

Mabel's willing response to Sennett's pictorial demands roused him to a sense of obligation to the little star. He realized that years had passed without his having made good his intentions of marriage. He asked Mabel to set a date for their wedding. She did so, and the month was June, and the year, 1915.

It was then that Mabel introduced to Sennett a girl with whom she once had served as an artist's model in New York. Mabel importuned her fiancé to give her friend a chance in motion pictures. Mack complied.

Two weeks before the marriage date, Mabel heard disquieting rumors. She was told that the girl was "making a set for Mack." Mabel ridiculed this gossip. Evidence was accumulating that her fiancé was enjoying a "last fling" before settling down to married life. Mabel was not prudish.

But the rumors grew until Mabel became genuinely disturbed. One evening she called on the girl, intending to ask her if the reports were true. As they sat talking of generali-

ties, Mabel became ashamed of her suspicions and held her peace. She drove off to Los Angeles.

As she entered her own apartment, she realized that her handbag was missing. Thinking she had left it at her friend's house, she put in a telephone call. There was no answer. She started to undress, for she was tired; but the missing bag worried her. She decided to drive back to recover it.

There was no response to Mabel's knock. She heard the phonograph playing upstairs. She went around the house and entered by the back door. She walked into the kitchen, then the living room. No one was there. Mabel went upstairs. She heard Sennett's voice inside the bedroom. She opened the door.

The marriage was called off. Mabel did not return to work at Keystone for many days. There are various reports concerning the aftermath of the incident. Minta Durfee says that Mabel came to the Arbuckle house, went to bed and lay there as though in a coma for three days.

Sennett was beside himself with remorse. He ordered flowers. Mabel would not accept messages that he sent almost hourly to the Arbuckle home. Finally, Fatty pleaded Sennett's feeble cause. A compromise was reached. There would be no more romantic allusions between the King of Comedy and his star. Their only relationship would be a business arrangement, and that to terminate with Mabel's present contract.

In the hope of redeeming himself, Mack planned a six-reel

picture, designed as a comedy, with a hint of Sennett's dream of tragedy.

His mother came West to see "what had happened." Mabel adored this grand old lady, who never stood in awe of her successful son. Mamma Sinnott recently had been to Rome. She carried to Edendale a great many beads which had been blessed by the Holy Father. She gave Mabel a rosary and comforted her.

Mamma Sinnott was a great favorite with the gag-men, although they shied at her religious aphorisms. They found that she had a fine sense of humor, and they liked to hear her upbraid her son.

The picture which Mack planned as atonement for the injury done Mabel was called *Mickey*. She was unable to begin it for a long time. The first of a series of illnesses kept her in bed. She had sinus trouble, and to alleviate it, she occasionally took a narcotic. This gave rise to the persistent report that she was an incurable "dope."

*Mickey* was begun in 1916, and was not finished until the next year. An epidemic of misfortunes beset it. From the beginning, the picture seemed doomed. Illness, accident, story changes and all other trials known to motion-picture production hounded this work. Then, after *Mickey* was completed, the big exhibitors refused to buy it! They insisted it was too cerebral.

*Mickey* had eaten into Sennett's personal capital and was consuming some of the assets of his company. He had neg-

lected other work to make this picture a success. He felt that his heart, as well as his bank roll, was at stake.

Sennett took his film *East*, to peddle it in person. He met with one rebuff after another. Men who wanted to buy it solely because of Sennett's unimpeachable record as a comedy producer said they had to refuse. Finally Kessel and Bauman put *Mickey* on the shelf, a total loss of \$600,000. Sennett was downcast. Mabel refused to renew her contract with Keystone. Arbuckle also accepted a better offer. The plight of the King of Comedy was becoming more and more serious. He had met every emergency bravely. He was not afraid of financial loss; what hurt him most was that his stars deserted him.

*Mickey* had been on the shelves of a New York film exchange for almost a year. One Saturday night, a small theater at Bayside, Long Island, failed to receive its allotted picture for Sunday's program. The manager telephoned the film exchange. A new man, unfamiliar with the office, sent a messenger with a set of six reels. The manager did not know what the picture was. Nor did he care; his theater would not be dark on Sunday.

The randomly chosen cans of film contained Sennett's *Mickey*. The theater manager was unaware of its history or of the fact that the big exhibitors had turned it down a year ago. It was immaterial to him that this feature had been repudiated and shelved. By three o'clock Sunday after-

noon a line of patrons stood two deep and for three blocks at his showhouse. He ran the film until midnight, and still the throngs came.

The news of the *Mickey* success spread to other Long Island towns. Finally it was given in New York. It was a smash hit, a record breaker. For four years *Mickey* was shown all over the world. It became known as "the mortgage lifter."

Sennett asked Mabel to return to work. There would be other *Mickeys*. She said she would never come back to Keystone. Her pride kept her away. She accepted a year's contract from Samuel Goldwyn at a salary of \$175,000. She who had been so dependable and eager to work, now balked, played truant. She behaved recklessly, concealing from herself as well as from the world what gnawed at her heart. She sought escape, solace.

In the midst of a Goldwyn picture, and without warning, Mabel vanished from the set. She went to New York, stopped only long enough to obtain a passport and sailed for France. She became the darling of Parisian dressmakers and startled the blasé capital by ordering a cloth-of-gold gown, said to have cost \$10,000. She drank wine and bought gems. She threw money to the servants. The sycophants of the boulevards encouraged her madcap career.

One morning, awakened by remorse, she ordered the maid to pack her luggage. She was going home. Home? Had she



ever had a home since the days she spent in Staten Island, playing baseball with the boys of the neighborhood?

Half-way across the Atlantic, she recovered her spirits enough to startle a boresome tiger hunter by diving nude into the ship's swimming tank. The Bengal explorer proposed marriage. Mabel suddenly felt the lack of one of Mack's property bludgeons. She uttered a loud meow and the dauntless tiger stalker sought shelter at the bar.

A group of Mabel's girl friends welcomed her at the New York pier. They wanted to see the widely publicized gown made of golden thread, a creation which weighed forty pounds.

"I'll do better than that," said Mabel. "I'll take you to the place where I bought it."

She obtained passports for the girls and promptly left for Europe, while Samuel Goldwyn groaned over the long-distance telephone. The Parisians were amazed and gladdened by the swift reappearance of Lady Bountiful. She purchased outfits and presents for her party. There were nightly wine suppers—but no lasting escape from the imminence of tragedy. She tried to analyze this strange foreboding, wept and then gave way to wild outbursts of laughter.

"I've got hysteria of the soul," she said. "Drink up."

Once again she returned to America, and found another group of friends awaiting her. When they jestingly said it was "time to take another trip to Europe," she accepted it as a dare. There were more passports, another crossing and a

third descent on the gowners, the perfumers and the jewelers of the ancient city of saints and sewers. Samuel Goldwyn, in far-away Hollywood, chewed his fingernails and said:

"It's a carriage of misjustice."

The three successive invasions of Parisian wine cellars and rag bags cost Mabel nearly a quarter of a million dollars!

"The next time," she said, "I'll confine my sea trips to the Staten Island ferry, the best ride in the world for a nickel."

While in a New York hotel, Mabel received a long-distance telephone call from Mack Sennett. "Hello, Bathhouse John," she said. "A voice from the tomb."

"I want you to come to work," said Sennett.

"Is it something honest?"

"I've got a dandy picture, Mabel. Nobody but you can play it."

"Cinderella once again, eh? What would happen, Mike, if you made Cinderella a tough girl?"

"There's nothing wrong with Cinderella," said Sennett. "She and Camille are the best plots there are."

"You're telling me!" said Mabel. "The *best* plots? They're the *only* plots Hollywood ever had. In fact, Cinderella and the Camille kid crossed the plains in Forty-nine. They're pioneers. How's your health, Mike?"

"It's fine. Now stop kidding and come back to work."

"Thumbs down. I won't do any more shorts. I'm tired of being Cinderella. In fact, I'm tired of being Mabel Normand."

"That's not like you, Mabel. It's work you need. Get off that merry-go-round and come on home."

"I've got nine months to go on the Goldwyn contract."

"I'll fix that, Mabel. If it was like the old days, I'd make you come home."

There was a pause. "If it was like the old days, Mike, I'd never have left home."

"Hello," said Mack. "Hello . . . Hello . . ."

She had hung up.

Mack Sennett set his boys at work on a six-reel feature comedy to be called *Molly-O*. He spoke of Mabel Normand as the leading woman. The aides, thinking that Goldwyn never would release Mabel from her contract, assumed that Mack's talk of her was another evidence of his "mythical casting" obsession. Finally, he convinced his writers that Mabel really was coming back to Keystone, but that it would be eight or nine months until she could do so.

The problem which faced the Edendale trio of Griffith, Grey and Glassmyer was how to obtain the maximum loafing time out of the *Molly-O* assignment. They put their heads together and finished a complete story within a week. The three G's were careful, however, not to inform Mack of this feat. They brooded, stewed, hemmed and hawed in conference, and parcelled out the story piecemeal, or at the rate of one-half an idea per conference. Mack was patience itself.

"Take your time, boys," he said. "This is for Mabel, and I want the best story ever written."

The stalling tactics of the three aces gained them many afternoons off in the gardens. Glassmyer could inspect his real-estate holdings, and Grey could cement relations with all the booze vendors in Southern California. These gay spirits hated to see their God-given holiday come to an end, but the nine months were up and Mabel was due at the studio. They shook hands all round and submitted their latest pictorial idea of *Molly-O*, a climax which they had concocted so long before that they came within a hair's breadth of forgetting it entirely.

After Spokesman Griffith had erupted the final scene, emphasized it, enacted it with gestures, Sennett said:

"It's fine, boys, but I've got news. Goldwyn has wheedled me into letting Mabel stay with him for *another six months*."

Three faces grew long. If only they had known! Another six months of play and hurrah could have been added to their furlough. It was here that Mr. Glassmyer, the learned critic, proved his mettle.

"This is just a rough draft, what we have given you," he said. "More work is to be done. Much more. More than even *you* realize. We all know that nine months is needed for the normal gestation of the infant human. A child is born, you say? Ah! But what of his infancy, his nursery days, his education?"

"The hell with all that," said Sennett. "In this picture

you've got the heroine, Mabel, meeting the hero, Lionel Barrymore. I want the picture improved, of course, but where do we go from here? It's a natural end."

"Quite right," said Glassmyer. "Quite right. But why not go on and show the married life of Mabel and Owen Moore?"

"Barrymore," Mr. Sennett corrected him in this mythical casting. "Mabel and Barrymore."

"I always get my Moores mixed," said Glassmyer.

"Go ahead and try the marriage," said Sennett. "Do your best, boys."

The married life of Mabel and "Lionel Barrymore" occupied the three rogues for another six months. That is, they made up the story in three days, but it required six months to tell it in fragments. Mabel reported for work, and when the picture was finished, Sennett found that he had *two* stories, Siamese twins that belonged in a sideshow rather than on a screen. There was a sequence at the close of the second story which showed a man running along the top of a sausage balloon a mile in the air. It had cost a lot of money and was the most hazardous stunt ever evolved in a movie without recourse to trick camera shots or double exposures.

"We've got to keep the Zeppelin," said Mack.

This situation resulted in the cutting-room crisis referred to in a previous chapter and which was saved only by Al McNeil's fortuitous failure to send Reel Five to the Santa Barbara pre-view.

*Molly-O* received great acclaim by the critics and seemed destined to break all records for a comedy film. But that was not to be. Presumably Fate does not read movie criticisms.

Mabel Normand was now in the mid-summer of her artistic career. In the eyes of the world, she possessed nearly all the advantages which constitute a girl's utopia. The public was sure she could choose love among ten thousand Prince Charmings. How was her audience to know that her heart had been given to a man who once had beaten rivets into boilers; that it never could be given wholly to anyone else? She was admired the earth over, as no real princess ever had been. She had wealth, great beauty and all the luxuries. Did not her care-free manner, her gay smile, prove that she was the happiest of mortals? That radiant face, with its impish smile, was flashed on a hundred magic screens. It never occurred to the shop girls, as they imitated her walk, her dress and the way she wore her hair, that in the morning Cinderella's pillow was wet with tears.

Mabel's ingenuous desire to learn by reading remained unappeased. She sought out people who could talk impressively of an intellectual world in which she felt an alien. She could see through pretense, even if it was cloaked in polysyllables. None the less, a sound argument, backed by literary allusions, made her sensitively aware of her deficiencies. And deficiencies had to be remedied!

She cultivated the friendship of middle-aged men, whose minds she admired. They, in turn, were captivated by the elfin vivacity of her mind. There were no conceivable grounds for sordid guesses as to these relationships. The association was purely that of master and pupil.

Among her revered professors was William Desmond Taylor, celebrated motion-picture director. The library of this forty-five-year-old gentleman was a refuge from the world's rude inanities. An urbane and intelligent man, it was inevitable that Taylor would gather in his circle women who insisted on idealizing more than his intellect. To Mabel, however, he was a congenial companion, a man of refinement, charm and learning. They discussed books as though speaking of mutual friends. Taylor was not a pedant nor an artistic poseur.

In company of this thoughtful man, Mabel was not chided for eating peanuts while they talked of philosophy. Nor did Taylor scowl when she upheld the virtues of that ruddy barber-shop tract, the *Police Gazette*.

"The *Police Gazette* has its own peculiar charms," he said. "In fact, I only avoid an addiction to it through sheer will power."

Among the young women who were in love with Taylor was Mary Miles Minter, then at the impressionable age of seventeen. He often pointed out to her the wide discrepancy in their ages, but the girl declared that they would be mar-

ried. Mary's mother, it was said, violently opposed this match.

Taylor lived in Alvarado Court, near Westlake Park, in one of a group of sixteen bungalow apartments. Several other motion-picture personages were his neighbors, among them Chaplin's leading lady, Edna Purviance, and Mr. and Mrs. Douglas McLean.

One February afternoon, and after the initial success of *Molly-O*, Mabel took some valuable Christmas gifts to the vaults of Hellman's Bank. While there she telephoned her maid, who said:

"Mr. Taylor's been calling you all afternoon. Says he has a book for you."

Mabel directed her chauffeur, William Davis, to make a stop at Alvarado Court. On her way to the Taylor residence, she remembered that the new *Police Gazette* was on the stands. She called to Chauffeur Davis to get her a copy, and also buy her a bag of peanuts. Thus surrounded by her favorite comforts, Mabel proceeded to the home of her mentor.

She asked Davis to wait in the limousine. "I'll be out in a jiffy. I'm tired and want to go home."

Taylor's colored valet, Henry Peavy, admitted Mabel and looked with some dread on the bag of peanuts. She usually shelled them and flung the husks on the floor.

"Mr. Taylor is telephoning," said Peavy.

Mabel walked up and down the living room while Taylor was in the telephone alcove talking to his friend, Actor An-



tonio Moreno. She cracked peanuts as she walked about the room. She paused to examine two photographs, one of herself and the other of Mary Miles Minter. Both were autographed with affectionate phrases.

Taylor came from the alcove, greeted his guest warmly and said: "I have a book. It's an outline of German philosophy. Sit down and I'll tell you about it."

Valet Peavy came into the room while Mabel and Taylor were seated on the couch. He looked with alarm at the litter of peanut shells on the rug, then asked if Mr. Taylor wanted him to remain after hours.

"You may go home, Henry," said Taylor. Peavy left the house. Mabel and her friend sat for another half hour. Then she rose to go, and Taylor accompanied her to the limousine. There was a short conversation at the curb, and Mabel drove off. Taylor waved to her and stood, watching the car, until it was out of sight. He went back to his house—and to his death.

Valet Peavy discovered the body in the morning, after he had picked up the bottles of milk and let himself inside the door with his key. He was amazed to see his employer stretched face up on the floor. He called to the neighbors. A doctor and Taylor's friend, Charles Eyton, sportsman and motion-picture executive, arrived almost simultaneously.

"Heart failure," said the doctor, with professional finality.

Eyton went upstairs, and, according to Detective Lieutenant Edward C. King of the District Attorney's office, took

possession of a sheaf of Taylor's correspondence. What that correspondence contained, no one ever seemed to know.

The physician who had pronounced Taylor dead from heart failure left the body in position and summoned the coroner. That official arrived, rolled the body over, and saw a pool of blood. He called the police.

"Murder," said Detective Lieutenant Tom Ziegler. "Call the Homicide Squad."

The detectives found that a bullet had entered Taylor's back from the belt-line at the right side. They noted a peculiarity, in that the bullet hole in Taylor's coat did not coincide with the rent made in his vest. The hole in the coat was lower by some inches than that in the waistcoat. Lieutenant King's theory was that Taylor was seated at his desk shortly after Miss Normand had left, that he was bent over his check book, which position lifted his coat-tail more than it would the rear of his vest.

The McLeans, who lived next door to Taylor, recalled having heard a shot which fixed the time at about ten minutes after Mabel Normand's departure. Mrs. McLean had gone to her door and looked toward the Taylor bungalow. She had seen a figure muffled in an overcoat and with a plaid cap pulled down over his or her eyes. That person was coming from Taylor's rear door. The clothing worn by the stranger was that of a man, but Mrs. McLean did not think the walk or the physique of the person was of a manly sort.

An intimate garment, embroidered with the initials of a

famous star—not Mabel Normand—was found in a closet of Taylor's house. There also were a pair of mules, with some love notes tucked in the toe of one mule. The handwriting and the initials were said to be those of an actress. Three long blonde hairs were discovered beneath the collar of the coat in which Taylor had met his death. All these pieces of purported evidence either disappeared or were filed away by official hands. There was scandal at every turn.

Hollywood trembled. Only a year before the Taylor slaying, the movie colony had staggered under the manslaughter charge brought against Fatty Arbuckle. He had been held in connection with the accidental death of Virginia Rappe in a San Francisco hotel. It was to take years and three criminal trials to clear Arbuckle officially of the charge. The damage was irreparable. The man was definitely innocent, and yet the public would never reverse the doom it had passed in its hysterical hate upon a victim of injustice.

The Taylor mystery received world-wide publicity. Foremost among the names that entered the investigation were those of Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter. They were grilled by detectives; they were harassed and driven from pillar to post. For years they were to suffer periodic revivals of the scandal.

A public which had lifted both these girls to the heights now kicked the pedestals from under their idols' feet. It mattered not that some of the world's best detectives and a host of officials agreed that neither Mabel nor Mary

could have committed, or even witnessed, the crime. The habitual witch-burners came screaming into the public squares to rant against the sins of movieland. Down with the Arbuckles and the Normands! All Hollywood actors belonged in jail or on gallows' platforms.

For the dead Taylor there was no sympathy. He was set down in post-mortem diatribes as a rake and a betrayer of girls.

And now the clubs and cliques, the purists and the bigots asked that Mabel be banned from the movie studios and her pictures barred. Mabel was bewildered by this sudden, roaring turn of the tide. The snarls of a public which had professed to love her beat her to the ground. She turned to Mack Sennett in panic, and found him ready to face any crisis at her side. Perhaps he did not have the intellectual attributes of a Taylor, but he had something more, the adamant strength of a man.

Sennett had to withdraw *Molly-O* from the screen. When Mabel learned that he had suffered a loss of more than a half million dollars by this scandal, and that he still wanted her as his star, she knew that Mack's staunchness obliterated all previous indiscretions.

"This thing will blow over," Mack said. "They can't crucify an innocent girl."

The "thing" did not blow over, and Mabel's career needed but one more scandalous stroke to complete her ruin, finally and irrevocably.

This second ruthless bolt struck one New Year's Eve, after Mabel's physician had ordered her to report at the hospital for an operation for appendicitis.

"Who ever heard of appendicitis on New Year's Eve?" she asked, with something of her old-time spirit. "Not I. Tonight I'll see the old year out. They can have my appendix tomorrow."

She went directly to the home of Edna Purviance. Cortland Dines, a young Denver millionaire, also joined in the New Year celebration. The girls left the living room to go to another part of the house. They heard a shot. They ran back to the living room to find Dines on the floor, blood pouring from a bullet wound. Mabel's chauffeur, Horace A. Greer, stood beside the fallen Dines, a pistol in his hand. Dines recovered and Greer was released, when no charge was pressed.

A lady is fortunate, indeed, if she can explain one scandal. The woman never lived who was resourceful enough to explain two. Greer's shot was a signal to release again the pent-up fury of the world on Mabel Normand's head. Shattered emotionally, violently ill physically, her career finished, she could not summon the strength for resistance. Even as she went to the hospital, she had to suffer the added humiliation of being accused of submitting to a major surgical operation in order to avoid official questioning. Before she found the sweet oblivion of anesthesia, she turned to the nurse and said: "I sigh and surrender."

## *Chapter 21*

### FARMER IN THE DELL

**M**ACK SENNETT'S professional theory that tragedy had to be the basis of all true comedy now was finding new and ironical corroboration in life. What had befallen Mabel Normand had no comic aspect. It left him stunned by its incomprehensible causes and bewildered by its inescapable consequences. Life, he felt, had no right to deal such treacherous blows. There was only one way to meet these thrusts from the dark. A fierce energy might counter the crazy fusilade.

Whatever the soothing effect on Sennett of these new excesses of energy, the mirth-hungry world enjoyed the hilarious outpourings of his sorrow. Comedy followed comedy with demoniac rapidity. Twenty companies of clowns were

constantly engaged in the execution of Mack's dynamic fooleries. Slap-stick reached its zenith. He made stars almost as readily as he made new comedies. His competitors, armed with great financial resources and little else, tried to buy what Sennett had created. They tempted his stars with fabulous offers. There were defections. Sennett doggedly went ahead, undismayed, and fashioned other screen celebrities. He was too proud to buy his actors ready-made and too independent to bribe them to stay.

Desertion from Keystone was an act of treachery in Sennett's eyes. Even when he boasted that he would stand in no one's way, a change of allegiance by his actors rankled in the King's bosom. He was a tenacious and forthright hater. Loyalty, however, won from him a never-failing friendship and affection.

Even the most trivial evidences of ingratitude grew into voluminous entries in Sennett's filing cabinet of grievances. It was his practice to send his comedies to several eleemosynary retreats once each week. He took great pride in letting inmates of poorhouses, asylums and other charitable institutions see his comedies free and before the general public was allowed to view his product for money.

He was astounded one day to receive a delegation of quince-faced citizens. They acknowledged his greeting to Edendale in a curiously reserved manner. The spokesman—a born censor—began: "Mr. Sennett, we are very much dis-

tressed. Your actors cannot continue to use reprehensible words while before the camera."

Mr. Sennett was puzzled. "Words? In a movie? I never heard of such a thing."

"Yes, words, Mr. Sennett. And such offensive words!"

"I don't understand."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Sennett. They curse and say the vilest things."

"Well, even if they did, I don't see how that would hurt anybody," Sennett said. "How do you know they curse?"

The spokesman replied: "A group of inmates of our Deaf and Dumb Institute were shocked terribly when they *read the lips* of your actors."

"All right. That's the last picture you get," said Mack. "That's one way of keeping 'em pure."

The spokesman smiled wanly. "Oh, no, my good Mr. Sennett. By no means! That doesn't settle it. You must guarantee that your actors refrain from indecent language. We have power, Mr. Sennett. Connections all over the country. We can make it very uncomfortable for you. Other deaf and dumb people must not be demoralized."

"Get out and stay out," Sennett exploded.

Mack was a lavish patron of the Los Angeles Athletic Club, where he resided. He was a one-man entertainment committee. He enlisted his stars to keep his fellow members amused. His films were always available free of charge for



his comrades in athletics. No smoker was complete without the Sennett directorial touch. He luxuriated in conspicuous back-slapping.

Once he decided that his services to the club deserved a little recognition. Foregoing a consultation with the house manager, Mack set up a motion-picture camera in his room and pointed it out the window. He trained the lens on the roof of a building across the street, where a mob of Sennett jesters were poised to begin one of the famous Keystone chases. Headed by the house manager, a delegation of corpulent athletes wedged their way through Sennett's door and peremptorily bade him to remove the instrument of his profession.

"It's against the house rules," their standard bearer said. "Take that camera elsewhere!"

"I'll take myself, too," the club's benefactor announced. He leaned out the window and waved dismissal to his tatterdemalion horde.

The King of Comedy effected a dignified exit, mumbling: "You'll live to regret this."

Not only did he settle his accounts and resign from the club, but he issued an ultimatum to all his actors, forbidding them, upon penalty of instant dismissal, to patronize this temple which housed both kinds of horizontal bars. To avoid temptation, he recommended to his employes that they make a wide detour when in the neighborhood of this *pension* for world-weary gymnasts.

Among Sennett's rising young directors was the ex-vaudeville actor, Chuck Reisner. This nimble fellow had acquired a reputation for fecundity in gags. The source of his happy inspirations was the five-and-ten-cent store. Reisner would stand in front of this bazaar each Monday when the window-dresser changed the display. Chuck would have a note-book and pencil in his hands and jot down the names of all the articles. Then he would ask himself: "What can be done with a knife? With a spool of thread? A fire shovel? Napkins? Plates? Dolls? Candy?" And so on, endlessly. After figuring out the things which could be accomplished with these props, Reisner filed his memoranda in drawers labeled: "Kitchen," "Bathroom," "Bedroom," "Farm," etc. Sennett rewarded this human gag-encyclopedia with a dual rôle in a picture, as actor and assistant director. Chuck was thus occupied when Mack beat an indignant retreat from the dumb-bell arsenal, the Los Angeles Athletic Club. He was blissfully unaware of the King's command.

At the next week's smoker Sennett attended, as policeman, to make sure that the order of boycott was being obeyed. He frowned when he saw Reisner seated at the ring-side as timekeeper for the bouts. He was annoyed further when the crowd shouted for Chuck to oblige with a song and dance.

Reisner was roundly applauded as he concluded his vaudeville turn. But before he could respond with an encore, he felt Sennett's restraining hand.

"You're fired," said Mack.

Deeply mystified, Reisner went home and drank beer for two days. His director found him there and asked: "Why didn't you show up for work?"

"I was fired," Reisner said.

"By whom?"

"By Sennett."

"That's funny. He sent me to get you."

The next day Sennett apologized to Reisner. In fact, he was almost too profuse, an indication that the conclusion of a picture depended on Chuck's presence. Mack remained on the set while Reisner was being "shot."

Reisner afterward became one of the ten most successful directors in Hollywood.

The sedentary environment of an athletic club having palled on him, Sennett now elected to shoulder the back-bending hazards of a home-owner. He moved into a large structure which became known as the "Westmoreland Mansion." The name was acquired from the suburb over which it towered. It had a great marble staircase, twenty-one rooms and almost as many baths as a Roman censor's villa. There was a private projection room where Sennett and his aides looked at comedies after dinner. When the room was darkened, some of the gentlemen would indulge in secret drinking. This covert nipping, not to mention the liquids the boys had imbibed openly during the meal, encouraged post-

prandial stupors. When such victims could no longer answer Sennett's questions, he would have the lights turned on and declare the night's work at an end. He thought it a great joke that he could hold his liquor better than any of his doughty crew. And, merely to keep the record straight, Sennett *could* drink without succumbing to those disastrous consequences which take the form of torpor on the one hand or rowdy and insulting behavior on the other. Bacchus and Sennett were on amiable terms. The grape only encouraged his nostalgia for operatic days, and he would render a vocal solo. Usually his choice of lyrics fell upon that laudable theme which declares that "love comes but once, and then too late."

There was an army of butlers in the Westmoreland Mansion. They were stiffer than any *officiers de maison* to be found on Chicago's Gold Coast. One of them wore corsets. The others had no need of spinal fortification. They were born stiff. It was Johnny Grey's opinion that they had been dead for years, and were capitalizing upon their rigor mortis.

With butlers and serving men of this type, Sennett's guests had to live up to a high social standard. They appeared in formal dress and forewent the conventional amenities of exchanging prurient stories—unless, of course, the tales involved actors. A Hollywood raconteur would forfeit his jealously guarded prestige were he to tell a pure story about a Thespian. Nobody would believe him.

Before long, the pseudo-Bourbon proprieties in this Pull-

man-car *décor* began to pall. Sennett and his guests yearned for the good old days of proletarian pleasures. Although the evenings began with heavy-handed formality, a curfew rang at eleven o'clock for the confirmed society addicts. Thereafter, the elfin Keystone spirit emerged through the boiled shirt-fronts. Inhibitions were drowned in the finger bowls. Glistening Haviland china tempted the dexterous jongleurs. The air was filled with costly missiles. Acrobatic gentlemen used brocaded sofas as spring boards. Oriental rugs served instead of sawdust. Sennett laughed uproariously at his butlers' chagrin. Personally, he supervised the grand finale of the evening—a Keystone chase through his own domicile. In his best paternal manner, he encouraged these home-brewed charades. Besides, a useful gag or two was often sired under his own roof.

With all his money, his Westmoreland Mansion, his inflexible butlers and hybrid social life, Mack had an irresistible urge to return to the soil. Every time he passed an orchard or farm, he would hold forth on the enervating consequences of luxurious existence. A Rousseau-like vision of the glories of the life bucolic possessed him.

An opportunity to return conveniently to Mother Earth presented itself. He went for a walk with his gag-men one Spring day. They ascended the hill to the back lot, where the sky-line chases were made. The summit dominated the

Sennett acres. As he stood on the wind-swept crest, he remarked:

"Gee, that looks pretty down there. Who does it belong to?"

"It's part of your property," said Gag-man Griffith.

"Is that so?" asked Sennett. "Well, we ought to do something with it."

"I always abhorred waste," said Lieutenant Grey, his tongue in his cheek.

"You're right," said Sennett. "I'm against waste too."

"If you raised vegetables on it . . ."

Mack interrupted. "That's it! Vegetables."

The next day some Chinese farmers were summoned, one of whom knew how to plough. "Go ahead and plough," said Sennett, "and plant all kinds of vegetables."

Three months later a Chinese agriculturist reported at Sennett's Tower. "We got vegetables. Plenty vegetables. All kind."

Mack again climbed the hill, his heart pounding with pastoral bliss. He instructed his Oriental husbandmen to gather in the sheaves and pods. On his return to the Tower, Mack took command and began to issue orders. He hired an Italian greengrocer. He commissioned his carpenters to build vegetable stalls. His market was situated in full view of the Tower, so that Mack could see who—if anyone—bought provender there.

When the vegetables went begging for customers, Mack used them as missiles in comedy films.

So pleased was he with his new venture—a farm on a studio lot—that Mack had his mother send maple syrup from Canada. Johnny Grey's home had been in New Hampshire, a fact which automatically qualified him as an expert on maple-tree products. Each time a consignment of syrup arrived at the Edendale studio, Mack would call for Grey.

"Here's a batch, Johnny," he would say. "Taste it and we'll see what we ought to charge."

On one occasion Sennett and Johnny were sampling a new shipment of syrup. Both connoisseurs sang its virtues in a pitch that led Sennett to regret charging so little for such excellent sap. He raised the price from \$3 to \$5 a gallon. His employes refused to pay the revised tariff. Farmer Mack was very sad.

Encouraged by his agrarian venture and disregarding the sluggish market for his products, Squire Sennett decided to expand. He built poultry sheds and began to raise turkeys and chickens. Neighbors looked upon the enterprise as a boon. They invaded his pens, made off with scores of fowl and indulged in chicken every night, instead of once a week. Turkey graced their tables once a month instead of on Thanksgiving Day only.

One evening Sennett's boys were having dinner at the Westmoreland Mansion. The host beamed as three of his butlers brought in a huge roast turkey.

"From my farm, boys," he said, smirking like a prize-winning rancher at a fair. "Not everybody has turkeys like this."

"No," said Grey. "Not more than fifty of your neighbors."

"What do you mean?" demanded the host.

"Simply that I've figured out how many turkeys you lost last month. Five hundred were stolen, and if they were worth, let us say, a dollar each, the one we're eating tonight cost you somewhere around \$501."

Mr. Sennett lost his appetite. "I'll inquire into *that* tomorrow."

Next day Sennett interviewed one of his farm bailiffs, a skinny Swede. Before Mack could go into the problem of turkey-snatching, the Swede said he wanted the day off.

"Just why," Sennett asked, "do you have to go away in the middle of the morning, when everything is growing?"

The man said: "My wife is having a baby at the hospital."

Sennett was fond of children and very sympathetic to incipient parents. "You go right away, and I hope she doesn't have too much pain."

The Swedish tiller of the soil was gone three hours. When he returned, he looked downcast. Sennett met him behind a turkey house and asked: "Well, my boy, how did she go?"

The man muttered something in Swedish and scowled. Sennett asked: "I said, how is your wife?"

"I guess she bane all right," said the Nordic yeoman.



"Guess?" said Sennett. "Don't you know?"

"Yeah. I know. I know plenty much."

"What you sore about? Was it only a girl?"

"I don't know if she bane girl."

Mr. Sennett was confused. "You mean you don't know its sex? I mean is it a boy or a girl?"

The fellow said: "It bane a Yap!"

"A Jap? What you talking about?"

"I bane get diworce right away. My wife born a big funny Yap and I tank I know de fadder."

Investigation showed that the child was a Mongoloid, but no scientist could convince the man that his spouse had not been dangerously playful with some unidentified Nipponese.

Sennett had a rather gay horse, "General Pershing." He liked to ride Pershing through his baronial acres. One day the General saw a tall fence and, without asking permission, had a try at it. Caught unawares, Sennett was thrown from the saddle and fractured his shoulder. Before going to be splinted, Mack sold the impetuous steed.

For a month or so it was feared that Sennett might not be able to use his left arm again. When the bone had knit, his physician recommended golf.

"What!" Mack roared. "Me take up a silly game like that? How could I ever explain it to my gag-men?"

None the less, he began to play golf, shot a good game and became enamoured of the sport.

One morning he came from the links to find a commotion at his vegetable market. His Italian vendor was screaming. Sennett, clad in plus fours and hob-nail shoes, ran to the stands to find a cub bear wrecking the vegetable bins. This animal had been appearing in a picture on a neighboring stage, had smelled Sennett's maple syrup and had broken loose.

Sennett charged the bear and booted it in the rump with a hobnail brogan. The terrorized bear retreated. The Italian, thinking it was chasing him, also began to run. Sennett accepted both their resignations and began to lose faith in his farming projects. His workmen crated what chickens the neighbors had graciously spared and stacked the cackling boxes near one of the stages. Mack leaned on one of the crates while a picture was in progress. The whole pyramid toppled and crashed to the floor. The chickens were released and stampeded across the stage. Audiences rollicked with laughter when this unpremeditated scene was shown. Per-spicious critics marvelled at Sennett's directorial skill in making chickens act as if they were really running for their lives.

For some time after his farm and chicken ranch had been liquidated, Sennett roamed the deserted furrows and pens. He was thus wandering one day when he came upon Johnny Grey and Ray Griffith. They had been playing truant and had not anticipated this meeting with the master.

When Sennett saw two of his gag-men among the potato hills, he suspected them at once of shirking. He glowered and asked: "Did you get anywhere on that Lillian Gish idea?"

In terms of his "mythical casting," Sennett's "Lillian Gish" was Louise Fazenda. Although the two fugitives from Sennett's concentration camp had not got anywhere on anything, Grey said, as casually as he could: "Well, Griffith's got a pretty good idea."

This remark threw the onus onto Griffith, who said: "Suppose you tell it as you see it in your mind's eye, Johnny?"

Johnny had pardonable misgivings. "I don't know. I don't think I could do justice to the part where the guy comes to paint the barn and sleeps with the farmer's daughter. I like the way you act out the girl's part."

"I appreciate that," Griffith replied, "but I don't want Mr. Sennett to think I deserve all the credit. For instance, where the villain, Mr. James Finlayson, has a mortgage on the farmer's house, you had a splendid title for the entrance."

"He comes into the picture riding a draft horse," Grey took up the cue. "The title, Mr. Sennett, as I recall it, was: 'He had a dash of sporting blood.'"

"That's fine," said Sennett. "A farm story, eh?"

Mr. Griffith beamed. "The farmer wants his daughter to marry Finlayson to square the mortgage. You go on with the rest of it, Johnny."

"Just a minute," said Sennett. "Let's have the daughter not want to marry Finlayson."

"Naturally," said Griffith. "That's it."

"O.K.," said Sennett. "Lillian Gish tells the heavy she is a good girl and that the artist who painted the barn ruined her. Let's see. I've got them mixed. Anyway, we want to start with a great gag."

"Griffith has a dandy bit of business to open the first sequence," said Grey slyly.

"It opens on the farm," said Griffith, "with Charlie Mur-ray ploughing."

"Is that your idea of a gag?" asked Sennett reprovingly.

"Louise Fazenda, *née* Lillian Gish," said Grey, "is sewing."

"You mean sowing corn?" asked Sennett.

This was a providential cue. Mr. Griffith leaped at it. "Exactly. She's sowing corn."

Mr. Sennett snapped his fingers. "Come on with the gag."

Mr. Griffith was desperate but resourceful. "As she sows the corn, a duck follows after her and *eats the corn.*"

The King of Comedy nodded. "Now we're getting somewhere."

Griffith passed the comedy ball to Grey. "Johnny has worked out a great plot point here. Go ahead, Johnny."

Johnny cleared his throat. "I have a title here. Lillian Gish gets a letter: 'Dear Miss Glutz: This is to inform you that you have inherited your late uncle's estate. He was last seen walking down a railroad track with a keg of powder, lighting his pipe.'"

"How do we clear the way for Finlayson to marry Gish?" asked Sennett.

Grey said: "Griffith has taken care of all that."

"Well?" said Sennett, turning to Griffith.

"After our heroine tells Finlayson that the barn painter had beclouded her good name, they see a picture in the newspaper. It is a photograph of the artist, whose name is Mr. Quillan. He is about to be married to a young girl in the wicked city."

"I see," said Sennett. "The farmer, his daughter and Mr. Finlayson go to the city to make the villain do the right thing by Lillian Gish."

"That's it," said Grey, "all but the finish, which Griffith has doped out."

"Never mind that," said Sennett. "The finish is a chase."

From this conference among the weeds of Sennett's once lush fields came the comedy, *Down on the Farm*. It was a phenomenal box-office success and paid for any losses sustained by the procrastinations of the gag-men, the thieving of neighbors, the failure of Keystone actors to patronize the vegetable stalls and the depredations of the syrup-hunting bear.

Sennett and his cutter, Al McNeil, were having a bath when a boy delivered review clippings concerning *Down on the Farm*. Sennett dried himself hurriedly and looked at the notices. An enthusiastic critic wrote:

"Once again the inimitable Mack Sennett has given us an hour of hilarity and escape from the slough of despond."

"Abdul!" Sennett roared. "Go out and borrow a dictionary."

"Where?" asked Abdul.

"From the public school down the road. Tell 'em we'll return it in a few minutes."

When Abdul delivered the heavy tome to the bath-office, Sennett was amazed. "Gee, look what Abdul brought. It's good you know how to wrestle." Then he commanded McNeil: "Get busy and look up that critic's words, especially 'slough' and 'despond.' It may be a knock."

Mr. McNeil used the rim of the tub to support the lexicon. It slipped and fell into the water. McNeil dived after it, but Sennett called out: "Let it lay, McNeil. We're doing pretty well without all those high-falutin' words. We just simply weren't meant to know 'em. Abdul, some beer!"



## Chapter 22

### THE BIRDS AND THE BEASTS WERE THERE

**N**OAH WEBSTER'S involuntary bath in Mack Senet's tub was a portent. His saturated verborosities were to be scattered to the four commercial winds. A public relations counsel, the first of a tribe of medicine men to conjure seductive words for Keystone ballyhoo, arrived at Edendale. Never blessed with the *Te Deums* of press agents and advertising psalm singers, Mack none the less had succeeded in maintaining an adequate liaison with his public. At length he was stimulated by the aphrodisiac of overstatement.

American industrialists had never been coy about themselves or their products. Their hitherto most extravagant claims were piddling when compared to the deluge loosed



by a school of war-trained propagandists. To compete successfully in this tournament of stentorian hurrahs, a merchant could not hope to sell a lead pencil or even a barrow of manure without waving journalistic banners or beating literary drums.

A peculiar manifestation of this commercial hyperbole was that owners of widely advertised products at once began to fancy themselves as authorities in all branches of human endeavor. A delirium of self-importance impelled them to besiege the public prints with pontifical solutions to moral, political, economic and aesthetic problems. To facilitate the mass production of wisdom's pearls, these captains of industry hired personal press agents, as well as advertising engineers. Nimble hacks prepared canned statements and aggressive blurbs. They also served as ghost-writers of interviews attributed to their omniscient bosses.

Movie producers became willing addicts to the opium of ballyhoo. They drew lustily at the pipe and believed every euphemistic phrase coined by their glib hirelings. They grew dizzy with synthetic grandeur.

Sennett believed everything he read in the newspapers. Had he not gleaned from this font of information that the boys he always had called by their first names now were Platos, Alexanders, Dantes and Cellinis? No one was more dumbfounded than he to learn that his once inarticulate colleagues were wittier than Voltaire, shrewder than Dis-

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raeli, mightier than Moses and more resourceful than God. Their audacity stopped at the name of Munchausen.

Awed by the profundities of his renovated peers, Sennett wondered if he, too, could not use a press agent. He hesitated at first to supplement his already successful technique with new methods. When da Vinci Griffith's press department made the modest claim that *Intolerance* was the "epochal, soul-edifying sun play of the ages," Sennett applied to his gag-men for an emergency slogan. He saw the futility of this mandate when Johnny Grey suggested the shibboleth: "Our comedies are not to be laughed at!" Mack turned to the Fourth Estate and hired Harry Carr, afterward a distinguished columnist of the Los Angeles *Times*.

The Carr contract is regarded, even at this late day, as a classic document of cinematic peonage. Embodied in the bond were precautionary clauses such as the following:

"No excuse from work, duties or attendance at the studio or on location or other place as required shall be good or sufficient, except it be in writing, signed by an authorized agent of the employer. In no event shall a written excuse be good for an absence of more than one day. Inclement weather shall be no excuse for non-attendance hereunder."

History will record that Pamphleteer Carr must assume full moral responsibility for the first institutional brochure published in a motion-picture studio. The *Sennett Weekly*, a *Zeitung* devoted to all the news that's fit to print about

bathing beauties, Keystone Cops and prostrate comedians, appeared under his adroit editorial supervision.

Professor Carr's successor to the Chair of Ballyhoo at Custard College was the seraphic and learned Walter Anthony. Like Glassmyer, Anthony was a critic. He also had served an apprenticeship as a police reporter. At the moment when Dean Sennett sought to draft him for the Edendale faculty, Anthony was drama reviewer on the staff of the San Francisco *Chronicle*.

This Brander Matthews of the Golden Gate looked with scorn upon the motion-picture industry. It was beneath his dignity even to attend an exhibition of the flickering tapes; nor did his newspaper accord free space to the cinema.

Sennett had gone to San Francisco in 1918 to open the new Tivoli Theater with *Yankee Doodle in Berlin*. He was accompanied by twenty of his famous bathing beauties—the first personal-appearance tour of any motion-picture players.

Eph Asher (now an executive with Universal) was manager for the Turner-Dahnken chain. The Tivoli was the key-theater of the circuit. Asher visited the *Chronicle* and found Critic Anthony pruning phrases concerning Shakespeare's misfortune in having Robert Mantell assault the beauties of iambic pentameter.

"I've brought you a big ad," said Asher. "Would you please come down and interview Mack Sennett?"

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"Who is he?" asked the William Winter of the Pacific.

When Asher gave a thumb-nail sketch of Sennett's life and labors, Anthony said: "I still don't know who he is, and I'll not interview him."

The business office of the newspaper, however, decided it would do their critic no permanent injury if he were to converse with the advertiser. Anthony and Asher found Sennett in front of the theater, his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his vest. Mack wasn't accustomed to being interviewed. He expected Anthony to do most of the talking while he teetered on his toes and spat in the gutter. After an uncomfortable ten minutes, the men went to a bar. An angel of silence hovered over them.

Finally, Anthony returned to his office, puzzled as to what could be done about the interview. Press time was at hand. Anthony began to improvise. He wrote about bathing beauties, Western sunshine, the virtue of California's women, and of their surpassing beauty. Unable to bear the stigma of implied deference to the movies, Anthony signed the piece: "By Mack Sennett." He sent it to the linotype machine and slunk home to Mrs. Anthony.

"I can't risk another contact with the nickelodeons," he said. "The Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* has offered me a job, so let us flee, my dear. I'm a marked man."

While Mr. Anthony was engaged in a chore performed only once by a journalist during his entire tenure of office in an editorial room—the cleaning out of his desk—an

excited Mr. Asher called at the *Chronicle*. He revealed that Sennett wanted the critic to become Keystone's publicity chief.

"That story of yours," said Asher, "bowled him over. It was a masterpiece! We've got a two weeks' tour with the bathing beauties. Come on. The world is ours!"

Anthony was turning his desk drawers upside down. Bales of letters, programs, a desiccated apple core, an old shirt and a whiskey glass fell to the floor. He salvaged the glass and looked mournfully at one of the letters which lay on top of the compromising mound.

"I never did get around to answering that letter," he said. "From an actor, too." He sighed. "Oh, well, it's too late, I presume. The poor chap died a year ago." He sniffed at his glass and then shook his head. "No, Mr. Asher, I'm not interested in Sennett, in bathing girls or in the cinema. I'm on my way to the dignified preserves of the *Post-Intelligencer*, where there is no open season on critics. Hail and farewell."

Sennett's importunate telegrams to Seattle failed to persuade Anthony. He relegated them to desk drawers. The tenacious Sennett ascertained Anthony's home address and began to telegraph him there. Mrs. Anthony grew tired of answering the door, only to find a Western Union cherub. She said to her husband:

"Why don't you name a price you know this Sennett person won't accept, and have it off our minds?"

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It was eight o'clock when Mr. Anthony despatched a telegram in which he demanded an amount four times the salary of the managing editor of the *Post-Intelligencer*, and ten times the critic's stipend. At ten o'clock a message arrived from Edendale: "When can you come?"

Mr. and Mrs. Anthony were aghast. Mr. Anthony sank to the couch. The golden blackjack of the cinema had felled another stalwart artist.

Anthony went to Edendale with an admirable promise to himself: "I'll get a year's treasure, save all I can, then settle down to some serious writing." Pegasus whinnied knowingly. He had heard that sort of idealistic lunacy from so many of his well-intentioned jockeys. On his return flights from the motion-picture Parnassus he would always be a riderless horse.

After Anthony had signed a year's contract, he learned to his amazement that Sennett wanted "one of those sunshine and health" stories every day. Anthony, alas, never could repeat the dithyramb he had composed in the name of Sennett. His inability to reproduce the paean on demand incurred his employer's misgivings. The King of Comedy could not understand why his new laureate should so quickly exhaust his afflatus.

A flowery job awaited the new publicity chief when Sennett began to invest in theatrical property. Mack had become dissatisfied with the manner in which his feature

comedies were being presented. He decided he would set an example for exhibitors. He leased the Woodley Theater, an odeon in South Broadway, near Ninth street, and opposite the movie house of Thomas L. Talley, the ex-cowpuncher, Los Angeles' first motion-picture exhibitor.

Sennett stripped the Woodley interior and remodeled it at the cost of thousands of dollars. Then he bought the Woodley outright, tore it down and built a motion-picture house according to his own ideas. He spent \$350,000 on this project and called his palace the Mission Theater. It was opened with Douglas Fairbanks' *The Mark of Zorro*. The Mission was regarded as the finest theater of its kind in the country. Sennett meticulously supervised the choice of all attractions which played there.

One of the pictures submitted for his approval was Metro's costly production of Vicente Blasco Ibañez's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. While viewing the amorous histrionics of Rudolph Valentino, Mr. Sennett fell asleep. On awakening, he wasn't sure that he wanted to lend his screen to a war play. Such film fare had been a drug on the market. As a matter of fact, production of martial drama had jeopardized the financial resources of the very company which now was asking Sennett to show the Ibañez creation.

When Sennett's house manager, Harry David, Gag-man Johnny Grey and Press Agent Anthony enthused over the picture and predicted stardom for Valentino, Sennett

yielded. He was astounded when the public crowded his playhouse during the entire run of the Ibañez film. He sent for Anthony, who arrived at the Tower just as Abdul was finishing the master's massage. Sennett said:

"I want to ask you a question. You're pretty smart."

From Sennett's tone, Anthony judged that he didn't mean the compliment. "What is it, Mr. Sennett?"

"What's the reason for the success of *The Four Horsemen of the Whatsis?*"

"In the first place, Mr. Sennett, it has a theme."

"Theme? What's that?"

The critic now was on his home grounds and at bat with the bases full. "A theme is what the play is about. The theme of Ibsen's *The Doll's House* is woman's right to freedom. The theme of *King Lear* is filial ingratitude. The theme of *Cinderella* is . . ."

The King raised his hand. "I get you."

Next day, Johnny Grey, Glassmyer and Ray Griffith threatened Anthony with lynching.

"You're the responsible guy," said Grey. "God Almighty! I'm about to add the mark of Cain to my hitherto unblemished brow."

"What's up?" asked Anthony.

Griffith replied in behalf of his colleagues. "This morning we went in to recite our new two-reel comedy to the Old Man. We felt we had done a good job. I acted it out in my best form and finished—to utter silence. Sennett spat in



his sawdust box and said: 'It won't do.' Glassmyer asked: 'Why won't it do?' and Sennett said: 'It's got no *theme*. And from now on, you boys don't put out a single story without a theme!'

Sennett's principal gag-men, Griffith, Grey and Glassmyer, eventually voted Anthony a member of their group. He was a convivial spirit and a valuable ally in an elaborate espionage system designed to keep them informed of the boss's moods and movements. A daily inspection of Mack's mail had been of infinite help in the revelation of his business secrets, but the snooping literati wished to learn more, to pry more deeply into the King's personal affairs, particularly his love life. He had become reticent in that regard, following Mabel Normand's departure from Keystone. It was to the best interests of the gag-men and their new ally, Anthony, to know of Sennett's emotional status, if they were to match their own behavior with his varying whims.

At last they hit upon a brilliant scheme. They examined the requisition papers in the business office. Whenever the spies saw a dozen American Beauty roses accounted for in the auditor's memoranda, they noted the address to which the posies had been sent. Then they could identify Sennett's beloved of the moment. This investigation served yet another purpose. The rose entry stood as a warning to any mere author or public relations counsel who might have a

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moth-like desire to flutter near one of Sennett's flames.

One morning the spies unearthed a name new to them on the rose blotter. Inquiry revealed that the girl recently had been discovered by Sennett on the bridle paths; that he had sent her horse home. She accompanied Mack to the studio, there to begin work at once as a bathing beauty. When the snoopers set eyes upon the new water sprite, they agreed that their employer was a man of unimpeachable taste.

Within a few days after this goddess had begun to splash in the Keystone pool, almost every Sennett employe secretly longed for her favors. The sidelines were crowded whenever she disported in the tank. Yet no Keystoner dared declare his love to this nymph.

From the great outer world Public Relations Counsel Anthony returned with an astounding bit of news. Sennett's newest bathing beauty was a fickle mermaid. Anthony had seen her away from home waters, an amphibian creature, after all, who trafficked on land with the hypnotic violinist of Mack's Mission Theater.

This violinist, Monsieur de Mandel, was no ordinary fiddler. For one thing, he had a profuse black beard and a maniacal eye. For another, he was the most highly paid pit-musician in the world. Monsieur's beard, his magnetic eye and his acknowledged skill with the violin made him the pride of the Mission Theater. That playhouse had come to need all the attractions it could muster, for galloping Sid

Grauman had opened his Million Dollar Theater amid a terrific ballyhoo and advanced methods of showmanship, elaborate prologues and special exploitation. None the less, Sennett's *Monsieur de Mandel* remained a sensation—particularly among the ladies.

Detective Anthony spent much time and energy in running down clues concerning the bearded virtuoso's amours. Finally, he was privileged to report that the Casanova of the strings was in the throes of a monumental passion. It was Operative Anthony's opinion that Sennett's girl was flattered by the concert meister's overtures, that she had accepted several costly baubles from his artistic hand, but that she was playing upon his emotions quite as skillfully as he played upon his fiddle.

At length this lass wearied of her whiskered knight and jilted him. She returned his gifts, all except a diamond which she retained as a souvenir, and went on her way to stardom. The hypnotic gleam faded from the maestro's eye. His fiddling became indifferent. He fell ill with unrequited love. He stopped preening his beard and looked more like Rasputin than Bernard Shaw. One night he vanished from the theater and from his home. He left a musical void in the cultural circles of the cinema capital.

The cause of this emotional stress sat one evening in her elaborate hotel suite, while the waiter served a dinner of pheasant breast and truffles under glass. An admiring and thoughtful busboy handed her the evening newspaper while

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the waiter was transferring the food from a side-table to Madam's board. She looked casually at the headlines as she nibbled a canapé. Then she frowned as she glimpsed a banner-line which read:

### LOVELORN DE MANDEL LEAPS TO DEATH FROM TENTH FLOOR OF CHICAGO HOTEL

Before she began to eat the breast of pheasant, milady shook a fork at the busboy. "I've half a mind to report you to the management. Do you call this service, interrupting a lady's dinner with a low suicide?"

Young Jimmy Starr of the Los Angeles *Record* was asked by Sennett to join Keystone's publicity department. Starr accepted a part-time position which carried with it a peculiar but definite duty. He was to report every evening at the Tower and recite a summary of the day's news. Jimmy was to receive \$75 a week. When he called at the cashier's window he found a check for only \$50.

"We deducted \$25 for Mr. Sennett's birthday present," explained the beaming cashier.

The indignant Starr learned that the employees at Keystone each year purchased a gift for their master. His birthdays so far had netted him four de luxe phonographs. And now, Starr learned, a fifth talking machine was in the offing.

"It's a nefarious practice and an outrage!" Starr said to the King of Comedy.

Mr. Sennett rose from the rubbing board. "Are you in pain?"

Jimmy narrated his sad experience at the cashier's wicket and added: "People are going to start hating you. You don't want them to hate you, do you?"

"No," said Sennett. "Just the opposite."

"They held out \$25 of my salary to buy you a victrola."

Mr. Sennett was dismayed. "Good God! They're not going to give me another phonograph, are they?"

"That's what they say, and I'm quitting."

"I don't want you to quit," Sennett said. "What would make you happy?"

"Nothing could make me happy," said Starr. "Absolutely nothing, with such an outrage going on."

At this time Sennett had been offering a \$100 prize in a title contest. Jimmy had heard he was almost certain to win the \$100 with his suggestion, *The Good-bye Kiss*.

"Tell you what I'll do," said Sennett, "if you won't quit, I'll let you win the \$100 prize."

"To hell with it!" said Starr. "I've as good as won it anyway. I'm quitting."

"Just a minute," said Sennett. "What would I do without my news report?"

"You'll have to read the papers yourself."

"I wouldn't think of it," said Sennett. "I'll put a stop

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to this outrage of birthday presents. I'm up to my neck in victrolas anyhow."

Starr won the prize, the cashier refunded the \$25 birthday deduction, Sennett abolished the practice of giving presents and Jimmy remained as Keystone's news voice of the Tower room.

One night, during an intimate press conference, Starr said: "Boss, that's a pretty tacky car you're driving."

"What do you mean?" asked Sennett. "It's a Lincoln."

"I know, but people are beginning to talk."

"What they talking about?"

"Oh, just saying you haven't got so much money. That you're in straitened circumstances."

"That's a miserable lie! How can I stop it?"

"Well," Starr said, "you're the King of Comedy, and if you're the king, you have to act like one."

"Tell me what to do," said Mack.

"First you have to get a better car, a Rolls-Royce, with a chauffeur in uniform."

"What'll it cost?"

"You could get a pretty good one for about \$18,000."

"All right," said Sennett. "Now go ahead and tell me the news of the day."

Soon thereafter Starr saw an elegant Rolls-Royce drive through the arch and stop at the administration building. A chauffeur clad in resplendent tunic, doeskin pants and puttees stepped down, opened the door and saluted as the King

himself got out. Sennett smiled happily as Starr advanced to greet him.

"Do I look hard up now?"

Jimmy inspected his boss critically. The King was garbed in old golf knickers, an ancient plaid cap and coat-sweater.

"You've got to dress better," said Starr.

During the news conference, Sennett put up a gallant battle against becoming a fop. At length he promised to visit a tailor. Within a month he underwent a sartorial metamorphosis. He then announced:

"Jimmy, I'm now ready to take up Pasadena society."

"Yes," said Starr, "but will Pasadena society take you up?"

Starr sometimes found Johnny Grey in the Tower room, his fingers on Sennett's wrist. He was feeling Mack's pulse. Although the stalwart and ruddy King never had been ill a single day, he often insisted that he had symptoms of a breakdown. At such times he refused to consult a licensed physician. Johnny would hold a watch, pucker his brow in the best bedside manner, explore for the boss's artery and announce with invariable solemnity: "It's normal." Mack would sigh like a relieved fog horn: "That's fine. I just wanted to be sure."

Interlarded with the news bulletins of the day, Starr would report gossip gleaned at other studios. Sennett relished stories about his competitors. One of the rib-tickling items had to do with Abe Stern, the backer of our long-

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neglected friend, Pathé Lehrman. Stern's studio had burned to a crisp while its owner was taking the waters at a European spa. A cable was sent to Stern, advising him of the disaster. He replied at once:

"Fire the watchman."

Sennett's publicity corps were accustomed to heralding their employer's sudden investments in gold mines, oil wells and real estate. They were hardly prepared, however, for the news that he had bought an entire mountain which overlooked what is now Mulholland Drive.

Eager to inspect his alpine property, Mack started out, yodeling happily, to climb this Keystone Jungfrau. Part way up the side, he changed his mind. He returned to the studio to summon road-builders and rock-blasters. He commissioned them to build a tortuous avenue to the crest of Mt. Sennett. This highway cost \$75,000. When it had been completed, Mack drove his automobile up the expensive trail, got out and proclaimed:

"That's just about the finest view there is."

He then rode down the mountain side, never again to return. For five years thereafter a giant steam shovel stood in idle and rusty majesty on the top of this eminence. This rock gouger finally was dismantled by an intrepid junk dealer.

Sennett's motive in buying the mountain was obscure to his fellows. It was conjectured that Mack had thought oil



might be discovered there. He confided his real purpose to Jimmy Starr while receiving the news reports of the day.

"Jimmy, I'm going to build the greatest monument in the world on top of that mountain."

"That's biting off quite a bit, don't you think?" asked Starr. "They have some pretty good monuments in Greece and Rome—what's left of 'em. And swell cathedrals all over Europe. And, before I forget it, the Taj Mahal in India."

"I don't know what they've got in India," said Sennett, "and I care less. But I know a monument when I see one. I want something like the Pennsylvania Station in New York. Lasting. Made of granite and marble and as big as all outdoors."

"What's it to be?" asked Starr.

"Wise guys talk of India and monuments, but the greatest monument in the world is a home. I'm going to build a home up there and live in it, and it'll cost two million dollars."

"That's a lot of money for a home," said Starr.

"You're telling me?" said Sennett. "I've figured how to beat the game. I'm going to charge admission to the public, and after I'm up in the morning they can even see my bedroom and bath."

The Sennett publicity department now was called upon to prepare a national campaign, when Kessel and Bauman

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signed an impressive list of Broadway comedians and sent them to the West Coast.

This onrush of stage stars presented a many-sided problem. Sennett already had more clowns than he could use for the stories available. Furthermore, by his remarkable ability to recognize and develop talent he had kept his salary rolls at a comparatively low average. The influx of the Broadwayites would increase production costs to an almost prohibitive degree. Weber and Fields, for example, were to receive \$3500 a week. Contrast this with the \$250 salary of Charlie Murray, or with Wallace Beery's \$50 a week!

Among other Kessel and Bauman stage recruits were Sam Bernard at \$1000 a week, Willie Collier for a like sum, Raymond Hitchcock at \$2000, Eddie Foy and the seven little Foyes for \$1200. As against these huge salaries, it is interesting to note that Chaplin had cost Sennett \$125 a week. True, Charlie had gone from Keystone to Essanay at ten times that amount, and within two years was making a million dollars annually. Gloria Swanson received \$65 a week from Sennett and left him to become one of the most highly paid women stars. Marie Prevost's original Keystone contract was for \$40 a week, Phyllis Haver's for \$15. Louise Fazenda received \$50, Billy Bevan \$80, Chester Conklin \$80 and Ben Turpin \$75.

These stipends, of course, were increased as the stars themselves advanced in popularity. Phyllis Haver, for example, received a raise every six months. By 1923, Miss

Haver was being paid \$650 a week. This actress' original \$15 a week contract consisted of *seven pages* of clauses and conditions!

Polly Moran earned \$150 weekly. Mary Ann Jackson, the four-year-old who used to delight so many Keystone patrons, was the recipient of \$75 a week. She was the Shirley Temple of that era, but without Miss Temple's salary of \$1250 every seven days.

The enormous income of Hampton Del Ruth, the scenario editor, as mentioned in a previous chapter, was possible because he received a bonus on all pictures with which he had had any connection.

Sennett ordinarily did not pay huge salaries to his luminaries, but once they had made good at Keystone, their fortunes were assured in other fields. Even when they failed to "click" with the King of Comedy—as was the case with Harold Lloyd, who spurned custard pies and a salary of \$30 a week to "go on his own"—the Sennett alumni seemed destined for wealth. Lloyd and Chaplin became the richest graduates of the slap-stick school, and among the wealthiest of all film folk, past or present. Beery, Buster Keaton and Bebe Daniels departed Keystone to acquire considerable riches.

Kessel and Bauman conceded Sennett's powers as a discoverer of talent. They intended no disparagement by bringing Broadway stars to Hollywood. None the less, Sennett resented any intrusion, even by his backers.

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Newcomers to Sennett's rowdy premises always had to undergo a hazing which consisted of swimming-pool submersions, acts of violence, practical jokes and public indignities. The Broadway stars mistook this manhandling as an affront. One of the few to see the joke was Willie Collier. The Keystone playboys had contrived to let an office ceiling drop on this amiable comedian. When he recovered consciousness, Willie drawled:

"That's nothing. You should have seen how I brought down the house in Akron."

Weber and Fields were idle for weeks before a comedy was assigned them. They called each morning at the studio to sit twiddling their costly thumbs outside Sennett's office. One day Mack inquired of them:

"Just what are you guys doing here?"

"We're supposed to work, Mr. Sennett."

"Well," said Mack, "you'll be doing me a great favor if you get out—go anywhere. Go to the ball game; but for heaven's sake quit annoying me. I'll call you."

The tall Mr. Fields and the short Mr. Weber were stunned. They sat for a long time on opposite sides of the room and groaned over the company's expensive indifference.

When Weber and Fields finally did get an assignment, one which called for under-water scenes, Joe Weber looked at the tank and then requested that the water be *heated*.

"I can't go in unless the water is warm," he said.

The Keystone Cops, used to ocean dips, attributed the Broadway comedian's reluctance to the effete life of Eastern troupers.

Sam Bernard suffered the agonies of an overlooked actor. Delay drove him crazy. Finally, he discovered a bed on one of the sets. He made a practice of reporting each morning, then retiring to the property bed, there to sleep for a higher emolument than any other male ever received for a similar relaxation.

Eddie Foy fought with his director, Del Henderson. Mr. Hamlet of Broadway was assigned to make his *début* in a circus feature. On the third day Eddie Foy, Jr., got in a mixup with his brother, Charlie, chased him off the set and pursued him almost to Silver Lake. The picture had to be halted. Henderson reprimanded Foy, Sr., for not making his kids behave. When anyone criticized his children adversely, Foy was ready to break skulls. He now began to grapple with Henderson. While this battle was in progress, Bryan Foy became embroiled with one of his numerous brethren. The ex-pugilist, Al McNeil, had to pry the brothers apart. Much of the fighting had occurred with the camera grinding and Polly Moran in the background making fun of Foy, Sr. When Foy learned of Polly's "fly catching," or scene stealing, he informed Henderson that he wouldn't work in the same sequence with any other comedian, male or female. To which Henderson replied hotly:

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"You couldn't work with anybody, anywhere. In no way, shape or form can you act, you big ham!"

Eddie Foy turned to his progeny and said: "Come on, kids. Let us foreswear this snide environment."

The Foy impasse held up the picture for two days. Henderson quit. The assistant director, Fred Frasey, had to finish the thankless job.

Mack denies that he ever "framed" the big-salaried Easterners, but nevertheless they fell by the wayside when Sennett's own comedians performed in the background. The Keystone veterans stole every scene and almost every picture from Broadway's illustrious sons. Mack attributed the collapse of the invaders to the fact that they were accustomed, in their natural medium, to depend largely on the spoken word; that without words they became lost in the unfamiliar mazes of pantomime. At any rate, Sennett's cheaper actors made hash out of the imported ham.

When Raymond Hitchcock arrived at Keystone, he did not remember even vaguely that Mack Sennett, now the head of the organization, was the same awkward dancer whom the great Hitchy had fired some years before. Nor did Sennett remind him of that occasion. Hitchcock entered the cinema with a confident belief that his art would pass unchallenged. He had composed a very funny sequence, wherein snakes would wriggle from his coat as he would deliver a Prohibition speech. But when the picture was shown, it was apparent that the mighty Hitchy was playing

straight for Sennett's comedians. They mugged and "caught flies" all the time Hitchcock was in the foreground.

Scene stealing was not confined to onslaughts on visiting talent, however. The Keystoneers kept jealous watch of their team-mates at all times. Al Santell, a director who received his early education at Edendale, recalls a beautiful bit of "fly catching" by Harry Gribbon during a scene designed for the cross-eyed talents of Ben Turpin.

When Gribbon insisted on marching up and down while Turpin was doing his gags, the cockeyed comedian roared: "Go sit down. This is *my* scene. I won't have another comedian grabbing off *my* scene."

Mr. Gribbon, apparently squelched, sat down. Mr. Turpin was mollified. However, when he saw the scene at the preview, Turpin went into a tantrum. He learned, all too late, that every time he had passed the seated Gribbon, the latter had stolen the scene simply by *crossing his eyes*.

When one of the New York comedians was asked to play a scene in which he was supposed to be exhausted, Sennett had Bull Montana and Strangler Lewis, then the world's champion wrestler, grapple with the star. By the time he appeared before the camera, the actor was in a most genuine state of collapse.

The most extensive publicity campaign yet undertaken by Keystone's press agents involved a merger of interests which brought together in one organization the three fore-

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most producer-directors, D. W. Griffith, Thomas H. Ince and Mack Sennett. The new concern was called the Triangle Company. The merger was effected by Harry E. Aitken, formerly of Mutual, who met the three directors at the Harvey House at La Junta, Colorado. Triangle was incorporated at a capitalization of \$2,500,000. The stock was put on the curb exchange at \$5 a share and quickly advanced in price.

The new film company, anticipating modern raids on the Thesaurus, promised the public "a history-making era of super-masterpieces." It was announced that the Triangle pictures would be shown in key cities at *two dollars per seat*. This was a hitherto unthinkable tariff for a movie.

The Triangle début was at the Knickerbocker Theater, New York. Douglas Fairbanks' *The Lamb*, Ince's *The Iron Strain*, with Enid Markey and Dustin Farnum, and Sennett's *My Valet*, with Raymond Hitchcock, were the three presentations.

A letter from Bauman to Mack Sennett, written before the genesis of Triangle, indicates that the company narrowly escaped the name of "SIG," a label composed of the first letters of each director's surname—Sennett, Ince, Griffith.

To a casual observer, Keystone's studio seemed to be run along haphazard lines, its stories conceived amid confusion and executed with hit-or-miss abandon. Such was not the case. Despite the apparent eccentricities of the King and his



court, the sound and the fury, there was an underlying plan, an almost mathematical precision in the manufacture of a Keystone comedy.

The studio was composed of units. Fred Jackman was the trick supervisor. He directed all the chases, handled the animals and babies for what were termed "inserts."

Another director, working independently of Jackman, handled the "straight comedy story." This director was allowed no scripts, even when Mack began to permit writers to dictate scenarios to secretaries. The director had to shoot the story from memory. If he became confused or questioned the logic of the continuity, he consulted the writers. Together they would review the story, bit by bit.

Neither the story director nor the chase director was aware of what the other had done until the film had been completed, cut, titled and assembled for release. All the chase director knew during the progress of any picture was what costumes the comedians were to wear.

At night Sennett and his gag-men would view the rushes. The directors didn't see these prints of the day's efforts. If the scenes were funny, they were left as they were. If they were not funny, Sennett would inject what were called "bits," such as routines by stunt men or animals.

For example, if a kitchen scene failed to be comical, the gag-men would insert a bit of business entirely irrelevant to the story but containing the element of surprise, such as a baby falling in the spaghetti. It was utterly immaterial

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whether these "bits" were story intrusions. An emergency crew of versatile comedians remained within call. If the gag-men's new scenes required a drunkard, a burglar, or some eccentric character, these types were available on short notice.

*The Kitchen Lady*, starring Louise Fazenda, was rescued by the Sennett zoo from box-office failure. A sequence was injected in which a cat was chasing a canary. When Louise climbed on the sink to save the bird, the cat's tail fell into the basin where a black bass was cavorting. The black bass snapped at the cat's tail and tried to pull the animal into the water. The cat leaped to freedom and ran in circles. In a room adjoining the kitchen, a paper hanger (who had nothing to do with the story) was at work. The cat ran thither and stepped in some paste. The way in which the cat worked to shake the paste from her feet "panicked" the audience. The effect was gained by placing small elastic bands on the cat's paws. In seeking to rid her paws of the bands, she gave the impression of trying to dispose of the paste.

One of the most interesting contracts in the Sennett file pertained to the services of the Great Dane, Teddy. This intelligent dog ranked with Strongheart and Rin-Tin-Tin as a favorite motion-picture animal. Teddy earned \$40 a week for saving many tottering comedies on the Keystone lot. The publicity men posed Teddy for the camera, a pen in his paw, and with Sennett looking over his shoulder, to

"sign" the contract. The document contained this clause:

"He, Teddy, shall render his services in a conscientious, artistic and efficient manner and to the best of his ability with regard to the careful, economic and efficient production of motion pictures and photoplays. It being understood that the production of motion pictures is a matter of art and taste."

Among the Keystone picture-savers was an elephant, Anna May. Sennett paid the Selig Zoo \$125 a day rental fee for Anna May and \$7.50 for her keeper. One clause in the contract read: "This property is not for sale and must be returned in as good condition as received, fair wear excepted."

Sennett had a contract with a cub bear—not the one which had wrecked his vegetable stalls in quest of syrup. It became immensely popular with audiences. This fact excited the jealousy of the owner of a performing dog. The dog's master thought that Sennett was "playing favorites." The hound's trainer brooded over the supposed partiality, and attacked the cub. He struck it across the abdomen with a heavy stick, killing it. The murder of the bear almost ended in homicide, when Sennett learned of the fatality to the baby bruin. Only the restraint of Abdul and a calming bath prevented grave consequences to the dog owner.

The greatest animal actor of the Keystone zoo was Pepper the cat. This feline artist was pretty much the boss of the premises. She had been an alley cat on the day she had

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crossed Sennett's path. She looked at the King. He reached down to stroke her fur. Then he picked her up and carried her in his arms to the Tower. Pepper became a sensation.

She got along fairly well with Teddy, but when that gentleman died Pepper had to work with three of his successors. The public did not know of Teddy's death and believed the three subsequent Great Danes to be the genuine Teddy. Pepper, however, was not to be fooled. She did not take kindly to her new canine associates. Teddy III fulfilled a long-cherished ambition and pursued Pepper with vicious intentions. This unscheduled Keystone chase shattered Pepper's delicate nervous system and ruined her, temperamentally, for further camera studies. Her dignity was offended, her spirit broken. Despite Sennett's personal supervision of her diet, his bribes of calf's liver and whipped cream failed to restore Pepper's *amour propre*. She retired to the peace of Edendale's alleys—the first and last Hollywood actress to abandon her career at its crest with commendable grace and disdain. Pepper let her public go hang!

Nothing amazed and perplexed Mack Sennett more than the staff of auditors he was now obliged to employ. They were always figuring in huge books. How could so many men keep busy writing all the time? He decided to look into this matter. Mahomet was too timid to go to the mountain of books. So he had the books brought to him. The floor of the Tower was carpeted with fiscal tomes. The office

manager undertook to guide Mack through the labyrinth.

"To hell with all that," Mack cried out in self-defense. "Isn't there a synopsis to all this junk?"

The auditor laid a paper on the rubbing table. "Here's an abstract."

"So what?"

"That is the sum total of everything. It shows how much you are worth. In round figures, about five million dollars."

"Leave this with me and take the rest of your library downstairs."

Cutter McNeil found Mack poring over the magical sheet.

"Look, my boy. Maybe you think this won't make a hit with a lady who's coming to see me this afternoon! An actress. It's twelve years since we saw each other. I was a kid in a burlesque show and she was the star. She laughed when I asked her to marry me, kicked up her heels and said she'd just as soon marry a mounted policeman. This paper makes it a horse on her!"

## *Chapter 23*

### THE CLOCK STRIKES TWELVE

THERE was a vacant plot of ground, about one hundred feet square, at the base of the hill where the sky-line chases were made. Eucalyptus trees stood at one side of this little oasis in the mad Keystone acres. Sennett used to stroll about the miniature park, alone, his graying head bowed.

It was whispered that no stage or other building would ever rise on the site of the little park, unless Mabel Normand were to return to Keystone. Were she to come back from the exile which a stern public had decreed, Sennett planned to build for her a dressing-room bungalow under the eucalyptus trees. Architect's blue prints had rested for several years in Sennett's vaults, awaiting the day when Mabel should loosen the chains of scandal and ill health.

Although he had been compelled to withdraw *Molly-O*, due to the Taylor furore, Sennett had starred Mabel in two other films, *Susanna* and *The Extra Girl*. They had met with disfavor in communities which persisted in condemning the fallen idol. Mack hoped for Mabel's eventual vindication.

"It's no use, Mike," she said. "I'm a liability to everyone."

Mabel retired to her Beverly Hills home and tried to forget her troubles. She was financially secure. Her real-estate investments had appreciated in value. She devoted her time to personal charities.

Among the friends who did not desert Mabel were Rudolph Valentino, Buster Keaton, Charlie Ray, Charlie Chaplin, Norman Kerry and Lew Cody. Cody had known Mabel since she was twelve years old. They had played together on the vacant lots of Staten Island.

Cody had intended to become a physician and had studied medicine at McGill University, Montreal. Amateur theatricals, however, persuaded him to devote himself to a stage career. He played with stock companies and achieved a mild prestige in vaudeville. He failed as a manager of operetta troupes. His first screen work was with the old Balboa studio at Long Beach, California.

Cody joined the Ince company and scored an enormous success as the leading man for Bessie Barriscale in a photoplay, *Mating*. He married Dorothy Dalton, a star of twenty

years ago. They were divorced and then remarried, and again they were divorced.

One evening Cody and Fatty Arbuckle were in a New York cabaret. They saw Miss Dalton, Cody's former wife, at a nearby table. Lew invited her to join his party. During the evening Cody proposed that Miss Dalton marry him for a third time.

"We're such good friends," he said, "it couldn't possibly do any harm. What do you say, Dorothy?"

On impulse she said: "All right. I'll marry you at noon tomorrow. Call for me at the Plaza."

After Miss Dalton had gone, Fatty and Lew tried to ascertain how much wine they could drink. Early in the morning they went to the Friars Club for a nap before the wedding.

Cody was the first to awaken. He yawned, looked at his surroundings, telephoned downstairs to ask where he was, then recalled that he had an engagement with Miss Dalton. He glanced at his watch and was amazed to find that it was five minutes till noon. He roused Arbuckle, no easy matter, and shouted:

"Get up, whale meat! We're going to be late for my wedding."

He telephoned Miss Dalton's apartment, to ask if he might have a few additional minutes in which to shave. Miss Dalton was more than courteous. "Yes, my dear, you may have a few minutes and you may have a few years. In fact,



you may have the rest of your life, for we're not going to be married."

"What's wrong?" Cody asked. "I'll only be a few minutes late."

"A few minutes!" said Miss Dalton. "Where were you yesterday? I waited at the Plaza until 5 o'clock."

Mr. Cody had an inkling of the horrible truth. "What day is this, Dorothy?"

"It's Wednesday, Lew. Good-bye."

The paths of Cody and Mabel Normand converged again at Edendale. He went to work at Keystone, a villain in several of Mabel's pictures, including *Mickey*.

Sennett and Cody were on good terms. One day they were having a bath together and began to talk about their theatrical beginnings. Cody said:

"The toughest season I ever had was when I backed a company, a bunch of bad singers who performed in a condensed operetta. The funny part of it is I can't remember the name of my own company."

"It is funny," said Sennett. "The name was *The Dairy Maids*."

Cody was surprised. "How on earth did you know the name?"

"That's easy," said Sennett. "I sang bass in the quartet for two weeks."

Cody was a gay, roistering fellow. Arbuckle, Buster Kea-

ton, Jack Pickford and Norman Kerry were his intimates. These lively playboys often included Mabel Normand in their parties.

"Mabel was like two fellows," Cody often would say.

In February of 1926, Mabel signed with the Hal Roach studios to make short features. It was to be her screen comeback. A pre-view of her first Roach film, *Raggedy Ann*, was encouraging. She began another picture in July and suffered burns when a comedy bomb exploded. She recovered and renewed her efforts to re-win her laurels.

The public again failed to greet Mabel's return to the screen with enthusiasm. Mack Sennett encouraged her.

"There'll always be a place, a big place, for you at Keystone."

"I want to make good elsewhere, Mack," she said. "I'll think about returning to Keystone after I've fought my own fight. You've done enough for me."

On the night of September 18, 1926, Mabel Normand entertained a party of eight persons in her home. Lew Cody was one of the guests. Mabel and he were reminiscing of the far-away days in Staten Island. Cody said:

"Say, do you remember me when I was just a greenhorn from New Hampshire? And do you remember the night I asked you for a date and you said you would meet me at six o'clock?"

"No, I don't," said Mabel. "Why should one remember greenhorns from New Hampshire?"

"Well," said Cody. "I recall how you never did show up. I waited until nine o'clock. And now I'm going to have revenge. Tonight we're going to get married."

"Are you kidding?" Mabel asked.

"No. Just marrying you. I dare you."

"You can't dare me."

Cody telephoned his friend, Charlie Blair, Beverly Hills police chief. "Charlie, I want to get married."

"What's the gag?"

"No gag," said Lew. "It's on the level and I'm sober."

Chief Blair came over to Mabel's to check up on Lew's statement and on his condition. He saw that everyone was sober. He asked Mabel about the marriage. She said:

"Well, we might as well get in closer proximity, so that we can bawl each other out without too much trouble."

The question was, where could they get married? Blair tried to rouse the clerk at Santa Anna, the Gretna Green of Southern California. It now was midnight. Blair couldn't locate anyone there. Finally, he made connections with the license clerk and a minister in Ventura.

Chief Blair provided a motorcycle escort and the wedding party started out in two cars. In one small town along the way, officers tried to arrest the Cody-Normand party for speeding, but were dissuaded by Chief Blair's good men.

The Ventura minister who had agreed to perform the

ceremony had several relatives as house guests at the parsonage. When they learned that Lew Cody and Mabel Normand were coming there to be married, they appeared in long flannel nightgowns to witness the ceremony.

After the ritual Mabel sat on the dining-room table. She began to cross-examine the minister. Did he marry many people? What were the names he liked best of all the people he had married? Did his marriages prove lucky? Had he ever kissed a bride?

The poor clergyman was getting a little tired and said: "I don't know, my dear, whether I ever kissed a bride or not."

"Didn't you kiss your own bride?" asked Mabel.

"I suppose I did, my dear child. I suppose I did."

The party returned to Cody's house at five o'clock in the morning.

In Hollywood, the land of public privacy, no marriage escapes the post-nuptial maledictions of busybodies. Speculation begins when the last handful of rice has been thrown, or, in the event of a command performance, when the final echo of papa's shot-gun has died away. When one considers the nervous temperament of filmland's brides and grooms and the noxious vapors they are compelled to breathe in this crater of envy, the wonder is that homicide does not follow the ten-minute honeymoons. Next to privacy, the rarest thing in Hollywood is a wedding anniversary.

Perhaps the only way a married pair might avoid the long-drawn hours of scrutiny of scandal-mongers would be to take up housekeeping at once in the Hollywood Bowl. Massed thousands might sit there, as at a Greek pageant, to see for themselves how matters were progressing. Naturally, there would be cynics even in this gallery to cry "Fake!" or "Boo!" whenever the newlyweds spoke kindly to each other or embraced.

It was unthinkable that the elopement of Mabel Normand and Lew Cody should escape the sardonic comment of Hollywood's gods and goddesses of discord. Here was no mating of placid, conventional citizens. Cody was a high-stepping playboy, as kindly as Santa Claus but as wild as a Thibetan goat. Mabel, too, was not meant for hobbles. Were they really in love? How long would it last?

Two weeks before he died, Lew sat in the patio of his home in North Maple Drive and talked of his and Mabel's attitude toward their marriage.

"It never occurred to the gossips," he said, "that Mabel and I had something in common other than the usual lovey-dovey attractions. We knew each other from the ground up. We had played together as children. We still played as grownups. But despite our big front of gaiety and abandon, we both had become terribly lonely. Like all troupers, we consistently refused to admit, even to ourselves, that we had reached the peak of our professional lives and that the rest of the journey was bound to be downhill. Somewhere in-

side both our hearts was that mocking voice that chills the blood of any professional: 'Where, my fine friend, do you go from here?' We turned to each other with complete trust and thorough understanding. We were loyal comrades.

"Despite our unspoken hunger for companionship, and regardless of the air of tragedy that haunted us, there never was a tiresome moment between Mabel and me. We joked and ribbed each other constantly. Mabel would live at my house until its masculine atmosphere became too much for her. Then we would live at her house, which I found too feminine. We came and went as we pleased, with no excuses, no explanations needed. We could be free, and that freedom brought with it a kind of love that was beautiful and earnest, despite the surface of our tom-foolery. We were married for four years, and, almost until the end, I did not realize that Mabel was as ill as she really was, so great was her courage and her pride in keeping her troubles to herself.

"Our only quarrels arose from her almost insane unselfishness. She had had a million dollars, but gave most of it away. One night we were dining at a café when some Russian artists began to sing. One of these warblers was a shabbily costumed woman whose voice as well as herself had seen better days. This woman kept gazing at Mabel's pearl necklace. Mabel noticed this, and, at the conclusion of the song, gave the \$25,000 string of pearls to the woman, who said: 'Oh, might I wear it for just a little while?'

"‘You may wear it always,’ Mabel said. ‘I am giving it to you to keep.’

"This was downright folly, the sort that I could not condone. After all, one does not go about giving pearl necklaces to strangers. I took the café manager aside, explained the situation and asked him to recover the necklace, which he did. Next day, I handed the pearls to Mabel, saying:

"‘It’s not fair to you or to the woman to give her such a present. She couldn’t possibly dress up to the standard of that necklace. She would only pawn it or have it stolen.’

"‘Maybe you’re right,’ Mabel said.

"By five o’clock that evening, I learned that Mabel had visited the woman again and given her the necklace. When she returned home, she said, ‘If you ever mention this matter again, I’ll hate you.’ ”

A series of illnesses beset both partners of this union. Mabel had pleural attacks in February and went to the hospital. While planning a European trip with Cody in April, Mabel was again taken to the hospital. Although very ill, she would not consent to a ride in the ambulance. She thought the vehicle resembled a hearse.

Cody now was engaged in personal-appearance tours in vaudeville houses. Mabel’s ill health prevented her accompanying her husband on these journeys. They were apart during most of 1928, a year in which Mabel attempted to make an independent picture as a Christmas gift for Lew.

That photoplay disclosed beyond question that the sparkle had gone from her eyes and from her work.

On Cody's return to Hollywood, Mabel again was taken to the hospital. An X-ray of her lungs indicated that she was suffering from tuberculosis. She wanted to see the X-ray plates. Cody had them substituted so that she might not know the truth about her condition.

Lew visited the hospital daily, bringing gifts to Mabel. She never permitted him to buy costly presents, but preferred trinkets purchased at the five-and-ten-cent store. She had a child's passion for opening bundles and packages, and, although very weak, would not permit the nurses to untie Cody's gifts.

During this siege, Mabel often talked to Lew about pictures and picture-making. She had a thorough knowledge of the business, but when he told her that *talking* pictures were a proven success, she would not believe it.

"There you go, always clowning."

Although Warner Brothers and Fox had appeared almost simultaneously in the summer of 1926 with sound pictures, Mabel never had seen nor heard one. When Cody maintained that entire dramas, with *dialogue*, were the rage, Mabel simply could not credit the news.

"It's the truth," said Cody, "and I am signed to work in my first talking picture with Gloria Swanson. It's called *What a Widow*."

"Maybe you're telling the truth for once," Mabel said.



"We'll do one together when I get well. But you'd want to get all the billing, wouldn't you?"

"Naturally," said Lew. "I'm a greater star."

"You mean a greater ham."

When it was time for Mabel to come home from the hospital, she again refused to ride in the ambulance. Cody finally prevailed on her to do so by promising to accompany her. On the way home, Mabel said:

"Lew, I want you to buy me an ambulance. It's the only way to travel. You can lie down, smoke, and, if you get in an accident, you're all undressed and ready for the morgue."

Cody left Hollywood in 1929 for a visit to New York. He was stricken with a heart ailment in the Warwick Hotel. Hope for his recovery was slight. He requested that Mabel be kept in ignorance of his condition; that she be told he was engaged in rehearsing a New York play.

At almost the same time that Cody fell ill, Mabel suffered a severe recurrence of her lung trouble. This news was withheld from Cody. Lew's manager, Harry Joe Brown, wrote telegrams daily to Mabel, and signed Lew's name. He arranged with his Western office to send telegrams to Cody, with Mabel's signature on the wires. In this way, neither one knew that the other was near death.

In the autumn of 1929, Cody was permitted to leave New York in the care of a nurse. He went to Palm Springs, California, to recuperate. One day he telephoned home to tell

Mabel that he was returning to Hollywood that afternoon. She disobeyed the orders of her physician and got out of bed, put on a frock and had the maid dress her hair. When Cody was carried up the porch steps by his attendant, Mabel had her first knowledge that Lew had been ill. He did not know that she was sitting up for the first time in ten weeks.

"Only one of us can afford to be sick," said Cody. "It's my turn."

After they had visited for an hour, Cody said he would go to a hotel, so that he "would not be a nuisance." Mabel promised to call on him.

That night Mabel was aroused by the whimperings of Cody's fox terrier, Traffic. The animal was about to have pups. Mabel insisted on getting up to take care of the expectant mother. She called Cody the next morning to tell him of the litter.

"Traffic always has claimed to be a fox terrier," she said, "but on thinking it over, she elected to give birth to some Sealyhams."

"That's why I call her 'Traffic,'" Lew said. "We're lucky the house isn't full of Shetland ponies."

The midnight vigil with Traffic aggravated Mabel's ailment. She began to cough and run a temperature. Physicians ordered her to a sanitarium in Monrovia.

Cody called at the sanitarium every afternoon. She seemed to be unusually weak. Her hands appeared tired and small

as she opened the presents that Lew had brought. She weighed but eighty pounds.

On February 21, Cody told Mabel that several of his friends were planning a birthday party in his honor the next evening. She said:

"Then don't bother coming out here. You're none too strong yourself."

"I want to see you every day."

"Not tomorrow, Lew. Go ahead and have a good time. Just send me some of the party favors, and I'll pretend I'm celebrating, too."

"I'll send you a lot of souvenirs," said Lew, as he kissed her good-bye.

Half-way through his birthday party, Cody complained of a pain in his side. His physician advised him to go to the beach for a complete rest. Lew telephoned the hospital. Mabel was asleep. Cody informed the night nurse that he was leaving for his beach house.

"I'll come over to see my wife in the morning," he said. "Tell her I'll bring lots of presents."

At midnight Mabel awakened to ask her nurse: "Did any packages come?"

"Mr. Cody telephoned that he's bringing some presents in the morning. Now go to sleep."

"All right," Mabel said, "but if any packages come, wake me up. I want to open them myself."

She fell asleep, to awaken again at 2 o'clock in the morning.

"Are you sure no packages came for me?"

"No," said the nurse. "They'll be here in the morning."

"Don't let anyone open them, please."

At 2:30 o'clock, the nurse called Cody at his beach house.

"You don't need to come to the sanitarium," said the nurse.

Cody knew what she meant. Cinderella had gone home.



## Chapter 24

### WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?

THE crown of mirth rested securely on Mack Sennett's graying head. He could survey his far-flung dominions and say with another comic sovereign, "I am the State." All the cinematic *sans-culottes* of the whirligig industry were capering for King Mack's profit. A mere hint of rebellion was swatted down with his bed-slat sceptre. The ex-boiler maker stood like a colossus astride the world of laughing shadows.

In the sedate realm of the two-dimensional medium, a duumvirate ruled. These co-regents of respectable hokum, in the name of art in its more wistful mood, tossed millions of dollars to their long-faced courtiers. Side by side on the golden throne sat Adolph Zukor, former Chicago furrier,

and his partner, Jesse Lasky, ex-cornet player and only white member of Honolulu's Royal Hawaiian Band. Together, they had founded the motion-picture dynasty which had emblazoned on its escutcheon the legend, to be read in a religious whisper—Famous Players-Lasky Corporation.

When Triangle was less than two years old, plenipotentiaries from the court of Famous Players came with papier-mâché olive branches. An *Anschluss* between the Zukor-Lasky corporation and the Griffith-Ince-Sennett interests was proposed with all the flourishes and ruffles befitting such an empire-making event. One headstrong principal demurred. Harry E. Aitken, controlling a majority of Triangle stock, was steadfast in his refusal to put his holdings into the general pool. The ministers bowed, wrapped up their hand-made olive branches, and departed with dignity unimpaired.

Resentful of Aitken's failure to agree to the merger, Sennett prepared to withdraw from Triangle. There was one factor that deterred Mack from summary action. Not the least of his contributions to the triumvirate had been the magic implicit in his name. Triangle had contractual rights to the name, Mack Sennett, and ownership of the trademark, Keystone.

Sennett was not averse to the relinquishment of the Keystone brand, which he had borrowed, after all, from the Pennsylvania Railroad. What he would not give up under any circumstances was his own name. It represented years

of struggle and had withstood Hollywood chicanery without a blemish. It was the badge of his success as well as a real commercial asset. He was entitled to its professional advantages, law or no law.

With Machiavellian cunning, he laid his plans. There was to be a conference of Triangle directors at which they would seek to compose their differences. Failing to effect harmony, dissolution seemed the only alternative. Sennett was prepared to resign. He held his own counsel, however. Not even his attorney knew beforehand of his client's strategy.

When the meeting was opened it became apparent that the opposing factions could not be reconciled. Sennett offered his resignation, contingent upon an equitable settlement of his holdings. There was considerable haggling. Sennett, seemingly annoyed, leaped to his feet and shouted dramatically:

"To hell with stock, division of assets and the rest! What I want is the trade-mark, Keystone. It belongs to me."

His auditors were astounded. They had anticipated that Sennett would make cash demands beyond reason. And now he wasn't interested in money at all! They saw his flushed face, his Ford Sterling version of rage, his Fatty Arbuckle interpretation of hurt feelings and his Gloria Swanson portrayal of defiant motherhood. They had not realized that the Keystone trade-mark was so precious. They forgot for the moment their fears that Sennett might seek to raid the treas-



ury. All minds were drawn toward the importance of Keystone as a name.

One of the opposition lawyers raised a hand. "Just a moment, Mr. Sennett! Let us view the matter in a rational light."

Mack shouted the barrister down: "The name 'Keystone' belongs to me, and you can view it in any light you goddam please. I worked too long to make it a household word to let it go by the board."

Amid speeches, threats, fist-shakings and raised voices—particularly the one which had long ago resounded from John D. Rockefeller's choir loft—a compromise was offered.

Unable to overcome Sennett's resistance, one brilliant lawyer assumed a manner of judicial calm. "Mr. Sennett," he said, "you are quite within your rights in maintaining that the said trade-mark has a definite value. We are prepared to reach an accord as to that value."

"All right, let's get down to brass tacks. What have you got to offer?"

The opposing party and their solicitors retired to chambers. Sennett awaited their return confidently. The off-side huddle resulted in a proposition that exceeded Mack's dream. He had hoped to salvage a few of his actors and directors; his adversaries made him a gift of them all! That was a preliminary concession. The title to the Edendale property became unexpectedly his. Added to this windfall, the conciliatory spokesman bought his Triangle stock, at market

price, and added the startling bonus of \$180,000 in cash! Mistaking Mack's amazement for truculence, the eager negotiators added a fillip by tossing in casually what their adamantine foe most passionately wanted—the name, Mack Sennett. When the ink had dried on the documents, the lawyers injudiciously congratulated themselves upon acquiring the coveted trade-mark, Keystone. Mack's parting shot was:

"Gentlemen, far be it from me to suggest where you can put your Keystone. Six months from now, you'll know yourselves. So long."

Sennett's valedictory was prophetic. In less than a year, the company staggered, floundered and collapsed. The King of Comedy incorporated his subtly re-won name for \$3,000,000 and released his comedies under an arrangement with Paramount studios, owned by Lasky and Zukor. This contract expired in 1921, when Sennett again went forth under his own banner. During his first year, he realized a profit of \$984,851.97.

Mack steadily added to his real-estate holdings. He increased the acreage of a ranch in the San Fernando Valley and refused to sell it to Bailey Brothers, Los Angeles real-estate brokers, for a million dollars. He had paid \$59,000 for it. His studio properties were worth upward of half a million dollars. He had gold mines, a quartz claim in the Deadman Flat Field near Grass Valley, which he sentimen-

tally named the "Normandie." He owned land believed to be rich in oil. He had a second ranch adjoining Griffith Park, and held onto the famous mountain, ecstatically mentioned in the editorial columns of Arthur Brisbane, America's benevolent apostle of house and garden. Mack did not know the extent of his wealth. Estimates varied between five and eight millions of dollars.

Less imaginative producers continued their raids among Sennett's actors. Undisturbed, the master magician continued to extract new talent from his inexhaustible hat. Harry Langdon, Andy Clyde, Sally Eilers were a few of his more recent discoveries.

Death conspired to reduce the ranks of Sennett's literary protégés. The writers could escape neither film magnates nor the Grim Reaper. Glassmyer uttered his last criticism of Prohibition brandy, and died. Grey's final title was in the nature of a testament in the manner of François Villon. He rose from a coma and instructed the last survivor of the Fiddlers Three, Ray Griffith:

"Take me to the funeral pyre, and then place the ashes where ashes belong."

Sennett's most prosperous years were 1924, 1925 and 1926. Then came the first blow of the fusilade that afterward dropped the art of slap-stick low. Sound entered the

cinematic silences, linking the eye to the ear. The movies became vocal.

Meanwhile a group of alert realtors had approached Sennett with an offer to donate twenty acres of land in North Hollywood if he would establish a studio in their neighborhood. The King consented and prepared to spend \$450,000 on this venture. Whether he believed in it or not, the talking picture was compelling him to shift his ground.

The trend of sound indicated all too clearly that slap-stick, with its comical illusions, was endangered. It was apparent to Sennett that the pantomime of his actors, when vocalized, lost its effectiveness. Audiences, which had joined wholeheartedly in the absurd travesties and exaggerated violences of a Sennett comedy, lost interest when spoken words intervened in a world of grotesquerie. Conversation and pantomime only served to perplex comedy audiences. Furthermore, several of Mack's foremost stars—including Ben Turpin—had voices unfit for recording.

A murmur was rising, not from the multitude, but from the screen itself, to make the King's throne seem a little less secure. He marshaled his forces. Gags were still gags; they could be modified, re-dressed and polished to meet the first hint of a menace. New talent could be drawn out of the hat. He introduced Bing Crosby to the screen after three major studios had made tests of the crooner, only to pronounce him definitely unsuited for motion pictures. Similarly, he rescued

W. C. Fields from obtuse producers who failed to appreciate the quality of this satirical artist.

The menace of sound did not abate. The voices were now climbing toward a crescendo. Sennett, the fighter, threw all his resources into the battle. He mobilized his property and had it mortgaged to the limit.

When the panic of 1929 descended upon him, he made the brave man's mistake of believing that he would weather it.

The advent of sound and the collapse of the world's economic structure found Sennett with his back to the wall, but still full of fight. Then came a thrust from nowhere, a sudden and unexpected stab which Sennett, like Cæsar in the Forum, accepted as the unkindest cut of all.

The animated cartoon was a new and popular toy—especially to a world in despair. It preserved and accentuated a thousand-fold all the illusions of slap-stick. The pen was mightier than the bed-slat. By the exercise of a few thousand strokes of a cartoonist's quill, a whole animal kingdom of stars came into being and had an immortal existence in an inkwell.

These charming imps cost but little, were not given to fits of temper and knew not the weaknesses of the flesh. They worked for no salary, and for the sheer fun of it; they would never grow old.

What did a horde of prankish animals care about censorship? In a Sennett comedy, if anyone tied a tin can to a dog's

tail, an irate humane society would release its furies. In an animated cartoon, India-ink dogs could be stung by bees, have turpentine applied to traditionally tender spots, be flattened by steam-rollers, reproduce their kind with strangers and otherwise defy the conventions.

In the olden days, it was considered odd, to put it mildly, when Balaam's Beast muttered a timely phrase or two in the presence of his astonished master. The screen miracle of a vocalized Noah's Ark is a matter of merry sanction.

A nimble rodent has become the world's hero. In the eyes of Mack Sennett, he must always remain a scraggly mustachioed villain whose mischief will never be undone.

Who killed Cock Robin?

"I did," said Mickey Mouse.

THE END